MAY 1960 35 C

# THE saint®

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

edited by
LESLIE CHARTERIS

## THE SAINT & A DEAD MAN

Stories by
LOUIS GOLDING
LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN
RUSSELL JANNEY
MICHAEL INNES

A Mr. Stephen C. J. Hudak, of New Jersey, wrote to me recently in part as follows:

"You say that the English and American actors do not portray your character of Simon Templar in the way that you would like to see him portrayed. I think that you are wrong on two accounts. I saw Louis Hayward as the Saint, and I think that he did a wonderful job. I have also seen George Sanders as the Saint. I think that Mr. Sanders also did an excellent job."

This kind of letter would not ordinarily rate a public answer, except that it is the most recent and flagrant manifestation of a type of correspondence which reaches me from time to time, and which has finally got my goat. Having served several stretches in the Hollywood studios, I had become fairly inured to the usual movie and radio excutive's brazen assumption that he knows how any character should be handled much better than the mere writer who first thought of him. But when ordinary readers, whom one expects by definition to be more intelligent than Hollywood producers, begin adding themselves to the roster of self-appointed authorities who claim to visualize a fictional personality better than its own creator, this wacky world has attained a peak of dementia that makes me dizzy to contemplate. The idea of an otherwise rational individual seeing nothing incongruous in solemnly telling me, the author, that I'm wrong in not liking the way certain actors have tried to portray the Saint, would be utterly hilarious if it were not so horribly serious.

Therefore, while I sincerely appreciate Mr. Hudak's interest (he is kind enough to call himself "an ardent fan") I shall now state again, once and for all, that the Saint could have been superbly played, albeit in different styles, by such actors as Ronald Colman, Cary Grant, or Doug Fairbanks Jr.; and if this is my conception of the rôle, it should be obvious that such totally different types as Louis Hayward and George Sanders were hopelessly miscast. How Felix Marten, the French actor who has just finished the first all-French Saint picture, will turn out, I'm now waiting to see. In due course I shall tell you what I think, and this is one subject on which all other opinions are predestined for my wastebasket.

I can be wrong about lots of things; but on all matters concerning Simon Templar I can cheerfully proclaim myself the one and only infallible incontrovertible expert on earth. And this I shall continue to maintain, so help me.

Leslie Charteris

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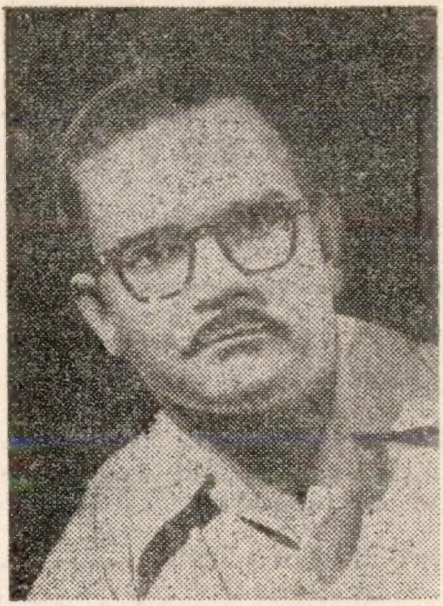

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What you are going to do, in that very first evening, is this! without referring to the book, you are going to sit down, and you are going to write—not five, not ten, but TWENTY important facts that you have never been able to memorize before! If you are a business man, they may be customers' orders that you have received . . . if you are a salesman, they may be twenty different products in your line . . . if you are a student, they may be the twenty parts of your homework . . . if you are a housewife, they may be important appointments that you have to keep tomorrow!

In any case, you are simply going to glance over that list again for a few moments. *You are going to perform a simple mental trick on each one of these facts—that will burn that fact into your mind, permanently and automatically!* And then you are going to put that list away. You're going to bed without thinking of it again.

*And the next morning, you are going to amaze your family and friends!* When you go down to business, you'll attend to every one of those orders—*automatically*—without referring to your memo pad! For perhaps the first time in your life, you'll be able to *plan ahead your entire day*—automatically, in your own mind—without being a slave to reminders, or notes, or other 'paper crutches!"

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# THE SAINT
## AND THE STORY OF A DEAD MAN

**by LESLIE CHARTERIS**

When Long Harry came out of Pentonville Prison, he did not expect to be welcomed by a cohort of friends. At the worst he had reckoned on dealing with an emissary of the Prisoners' Aid Society, and so the sight of the plump and ponderous Chief Inspector Teal lounging somnolently against a lamp-post not far away was an unwelcome surprise.

Pulling his hat down over his eyes, Harry began to stroll in the opposite direction, but Inspector Teal caught up with him in a few slothful yet rapid strides. "I want you, Harry." The words had an ominous ring.

"You've got nothing on me, Mr. Teal."

"I want you, Harry, to come along to the Corner House and have some breakfast with me, and then we'll have a little talk."

Harry said that he was not hungry, but Mr. Teal was not to be put off so easily. "All right. If you won't eat yourself, you can watch me and listen." As Mr. Teal spoke he was gently shepherding Harry back past the prison gates to a diminutive car that was drawn up by the curb.

They passed down Caledonian Road in silence.

"I suppose," said Harry, breaking a period of almost intolerable suspense as they turned round Park Crescent into Portland Place, "I suppose you aren't thinking I had anything to do with that Regent Street job?"

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"I've stopped thinking about that since I became certain."

"That's like you flatties. Let a man do his time and not say a word, and then wait for him outside the prison to shop him for another stretch. This time I've got a beautiful alibi for you."

"You always have. I've never known you to disappoint me yet!"

Over bacon and eggs Inspector Teal condescended to relieve some of Harry's apprehensions by explaining the reason for his hospitality. "Tell me about Connell," he said, in his sleepy way. "I've got an idea he's a particular friend of yours."

"Connell," snarled Long Harry, "is a ——"

"Yes?" prompted Mr. Teal drowsily.

"Connell," said Harry softly, "is a man I've met occasionally. I can't tell you more about him than that."

"Sure you can't?"

"You know I'm always ready to help you when I can, Mr. Teal, but I don't know anything about Connell except that I've a good idea he was the squealer who shopped me for the Bayswater joke."

"You let me down over Bayswater: I never thought you carried a cosh around with you."

"The whole thing was a frame-up from start to finish, and you ought to know it, Mr. Teal. I never used a cosh in my life, and I never did a porch job, anyway. And the man might have died, from what the papers said. Then I'd have been hanged. Maybe I was meant to be hanged. But Connel——"

"What are you going to do to Connell?"

"Well, when I see him, maybe I'll stand him a drink, and maybe I won't. Who knows?"

"And when I take you again, maybe you'll get a lifer, and maybe you'll hang. Who knows that, either?"

It was an unsatisfactory interview from all points of view, and Mr. Teal was pardonably annoyed. He got back to his room at Scotland Yard about half-past nine, and his assistant found him in an unpleasant mood.

"I've been thinking," began the recently promoted Sergeant Barrow, and Mr. Teal cut him short with a ferocious glare.

"Why? I'm sure it hurts you, and you know I've always told you to take care of yourself."

"I've been thinking about the Camberwell Post Office hold-up," insisted the younger man aggrievedly. "Now couldn't that man Horring have been in it?"

"He could if they hadn't hanged him at Wandsworth the week before. Go away and rest. You'll be getting brain fever if you go on thinking like this."

After that, Mr. Teal felt better. "And on your way down," he called after the retreating sergeant as the door closed, "tell Jones I want him!"

There is a special department of Scotland Yard whose sole function is

to indulge its curiosity, and the facts which it brings to light are strange and various. Some of them are gleaned from the reports of patrolling constables, who are instructed to note down any unusual happenings which they observe on their beats. Others are gleaned by painstaking subterranean investigation.

Of this department, Sergeant Jones was an esteemed ornament. He spent his life in a maze of card indexes, turning over the disjointed and apparently insignificant reports which came in to him from time to time, sorting the wheat from the chaff, filing away accredited information, and requesting the further investigation of those facts which seemed to him to require it.

"Sit down, Jones," said Mr. Teal, "and tell me all about Vanney's."

Sergeant Jones, a long lanky man, with sandy hair and a large nose, did as he was asked. "Directors," he said, "as follows: president and managing director, James Arthur Vanney, 48, of 52 Half Moon Street; secretary, Sebastian Tombs, Esquire, of no fixed address; director, Malcolm Standish, 34, solicitor, of Lincoln's Inn."

"Do we know anything about these men?"

"Not much. Standish we know. He's behind half the criminal cases that are defended at the Old Bailey—a lot more than his name appears in. If any big crook gets landed he sends for Standish at once. We've never had anything on him, but I shouldn't be surprised if he'd made a tidy pile out of some of the cases he's worked on. Vanney built that new house at the bottom of Half Moon Street about nine months ago. Two cars—a Rolls and a Daimler. Four servants. Does himself pretty well on the whole."

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*Author's Note:*

*I regularly receive wistful letters from old-time readers who wish that I would write some new stories of the Saint as he was "in the good old days." This involves a chronological contortion that I don't yet know how to cope with: I suppose I am not the historical-novelist type, and I can only see the Saint with the eyes I have now, and as I think he would be today. But to oblige some of these nostalgia-haunted readers, and edify others who may wonder what they are talking about, we are reviving this month another of those extra-old adventures.*

*This story has been somewhat abridged, for reasons of space, but I think without losing anything vital, and has been modernized in a few very minor respects, but I still feel bound to explain that some apparent anachronisms and contradictions in the Saint's character and actions are solely attributable to the fact that I wrote it more than 30 long long years ago.*

L. C.

"Where was he before he moved into Half Moon Street?"

"He stayed at the Savoy while the house was being built. His address was registered there as Melbourne, Victoria. Someone commissioned the architect and got the building job in hand a couple of months before Vanney arrived . . . That man Tombs is a bloke I'd like to know a lot more about."

"And so should I. Staff?" Teal queried.

"Very small. Girl secretary, named Pamela Marlowe, and two clerks. Pamela Marlowe was Stenning's ward."

"What are they doing?"

"Getting people to invest in various South American development projects, offering the usual fabulous profits—but they do it so cleverly that you could never prove that they positively promised anything. It's probably the old bucket-shop routine, but so far there haven't been any complaints that we can act on."

Mr. Teal nodded faintly to signify that the talk was at an end, and Sergeant Jones rose.

He was leaving the room when a man brought in a small parcel.

"One moment," murmured Mr. Teal, and the sergeant stopped by the door.

Teal examined the packet carefully, and then held it to his ear. Then he blinked, and a ghost of a smile crossed his face. "How surprisingly unoriginal," he remarked mildly.

Sergeant Jones came back to the desk, and Mr. Teal held out the packet to him. Jones took it doubtfully.

"Walk that round to the Explosives Department, and mind you don't drop it. You can also spend your spare time praying that it doesn't go off before you get there!"

Vanney's Ltd., vaguely described on the glass panel of their door as "Agents", occupied a suite of offices in a new block of buildings opposite Charing Cross Station.

Chief Inspector Teal knocked on the door marked "Inquiries" one afternoon, and was told by the clerk who opened it that Mr. Vanney was busy. Then, in another room, he perceived a familiar back. He flowed irresistably past the clerk, passed through the communicating door, and tapped Simon Templar's shoulder. "When did you change you name to Tombs?" he asked drowsily.

"Quite recently. It seemed a jolly sort of name. Didn't the clerk tell you that Mr. Vanney was engaged?"

"And I said I'd wait."

"Mr. Vanney will be engaged all the afternoon."

"When I get bored with waiting, you can come and talk to me."

"Mr. Vanney will not be able to see you until tomorrow morning."

"I can doss down in a corner, or have you a camp bed?"

Simon Templar inspected a row of buttons on his desk, selected one, and pressed it.

The door opened, and a man in a plain serge suit and a bowler hat stood framed in the aperture.

"George," said the Saint, "show this gentleman the way out."

"Suppose," said Mr. Teal, "that I had a word with you in private first."

"I can give you two minutes exactly. You can wait outside the door, George. Miss Marlowe, would you mind?"

Mr. Teal sat down. Then: "Nice girl that," he remarked.

"Very. And now let's hear the bright, brisk business. What has fetched you to this wilderness, old watermelon?"

"I was interested. A name like Sebastian Tombs seemed too good to be true, and when I saw you—well, I was just more interested than ever."

"May I ask why?"

"Somehow," said Mr. Teal, closing his eyes, "whenever I find you off your usual beat, I've an idea there's a catch in it. What's the game this time?"

"I've reformed. Am following the paths of righteousness, Teal, but I can't expect you to believe that."

"Then you won't be disappointed. Now can I see your bosss?"

"I'm afraid not; I've already told you he's engaged."

It has already been mentioned that, for such a large and slothful man, Mr. Teal could, when he so desired, cover ground with a surprising turn of speed. He had flung open the communicating door marked "Private" before the Saint could stop him, and the lights clicked up under his thumb as Templar reached his side.

The room was empty.

"Does Mr. Vanney automatically vanish, together with his visitor, when the door is opened?"

Simon put his hands in his pockets and settled himself comfortably in the doorway. He look quizzically at the detective. "I've never known him do it before," he replied calmly. "But great men are always slightly erratic in their habits."

"On second thoughts," said Mr. Teal, removing an imaginary speck of dust from his bowler, "I don't think I'll spend the night here. Bye-bye, Saint. See you later, I expect." He was sauntering down the corridor, having brushed aside the attentions of the affable porter, George, when a thought struck him, and he returned. He opened the door a few inches without the formality of knocking, and poked his head in.

Simon Templar was writing at the desk, and the girl was tapping the typewriter in the corner.

"Goodbye, old fruit," said the Saint pleasantly, without looking up.

"When Mr. Vanney comes back," drawled the imperturable Mr. Teal, "you might tell him, with my compliments, that if he makes any more childish attempts to kill me, I shall be seriously annoyed."

He closed the door again and resumed his leisurely progress towards

the stairs, humming gently to himself.

On a certain morning a grocer in South London was found lying, shot through the heart, behind his counter, when the assistant came to open up the shop in the morning, with the till rifled and the previous three days' takings missing. The man in charge of the case, before he allowed anything to be moved, sent for the police photographers. The pictures they took were developed and printed in a few hours; and these, together with the inspector's own copious notes, were sent immediately to that department of Scotland Yard known as Records Office, where are catalogued in one gigantic card index all the known forms, variations, and trimmings of crime, with cross-references to the men who practise them.

The usual scientific process of elimination then began. In this instance, however, the accumulated evidence pointed with the most convincing certainty to one man.

Mr. Teal, remembering his breakfast of a fortnight ago, took his hat and coat and went for a walk.

He ran his victim to earth in a public-house near Victoria Station, and took the next place at the bar.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Harry," said Mr. Teal untruthfully, for he had drawn blanks at several coverts before he found his fox. "What'll you have?"

"A bottle of champagne."

"Two bitters, please Miss," said Mr. Teal.

He picked up his tankard and nodded towards a vacant table in a corner. "Suppose we get out of the crowd, and have a little talk," he suggested, and Long Harry knew of old that when Mr. Teal made such a request it was useless to refuse.

He followed the portly detective to the secluded spot he had indicated, and they sat down.

"Now tell me about Connell," said Mr. Teal.

"I told you once, I don't know anything about him."

"But he did a job in Battersea last night. I thought you'd have heard—it's in the lunch editions. Either Connell did it, or someone who knew his methods inside out arranged it so that everything would point to Connell."

"If you're thinking I pulled that job to frame Connell, you're right up the spout. I've got an alibi."

"Then it seems as if you *must* have done it."

"But this is a copper-bottomed alibi. I spent last night in Marlborough Street Police Station. I'd been entertaining. It took three policemen to get me there."

"Drunk," I suppose," murmured Mr. Teal.

"All three of them."

"Do you get tight easily, Harry?"

"I can knock off a tank-full and not show it."

"Entertaining friends, were you? Then you must have come into some

easy money. I know how fond you are of work, and you haven't been out of stir long enough to earn that much honestly."

"It's easy: I got a remittance. An uncle of mine who went to Australia years ago, suddenly remembered his poor persecuted nephew in the old country, and sent me a tenner."

Mr. Teal went back to Scotland Yard very little wiser than he had been when he left it.

That afternoon an idea struck him. He walked up the Embankment to Charing Cross, and he was standing by a tobacco kiosk when Pamela Marlowe left the offices of Vanney's Ltd., and crossed the road to the Strand Station. "Excuse me, Miss," he said, catching her up at the entrance to the subway.

It was not the first time she had been spoken to by a stranger, and she would have hurried on; but something in the business-like tone of his address stopped her, and she looked around.

"I'm Inspector Teal, and you might be able to help me a lot, Miss Marlowe, if you'd just step into that tea den with me and have a chat."

Over a cup of tea, at his request, she narrated the history of her association with Stenning and Vanney.

"How did you get your job at Vanney's?" he asked when she had finished.

"Mr. Vanney wrote to me off his own bat. He knew Mr. Stenning, and he says that Mr. Stenning had often spoken of me."

"What were you doing before that?"

"Nothing. Father was always pretty well off, and he left me everything he had."

"And something went wrong?"

She nodded. "Most of the money was in Claravox Gramophones. Father put all his eggs in that basket just before he died. The shares were at or about 450, but the promised dividends were colossal,"she smiled ruefully. "If you remember, the fraud was shown up two years ago, when Stenning died and the company went smash."

"I remember. Claravox Gramophones was one of Stenning's companies. I guess that man must have held the dud company record for this country. By the way, does the Saint ever make passes at you?"

"No," she replied at once, and wondered how she came to lie so spontaneously.

"He wouldn't. The Saint's a clean crook."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, he's a crook all right—you'll know that if you've ever read a newspaper. He doesn't make any bones about it. The reason he's at large is because he's too clever. To give the devil his due, most of the men he's trodden on have been pretty undesirable specimens, but that doesn't make him an honest man."

"Why do you think he does it?"

"The Lord knows. All I can tell you is that if I've got any grey hairs, he

gave them to me. Of course, he's made plenty of money out of it—the men he has gone after had a good deal of boodle on them, a lot of which seems to drift eventually into the Sain't own bank balance."

"Then why does he work at Vanney's?"

"If you could answer that question, Miss Marlowe, you'd save my mind a lot of hard wear. All I know is that I smell trouble wherever the Sain't hanging around."

The implication did not make itself plain to her at once; but when she had grasped it, she stopped with her cup half-way to her lips, and stared. "Do you mean Vanney's isn't straight?"

"I've a good idea that Vanney's is one of the crookedest shows in the history of commerce."

While she digested this startling piece of information, he gazed at her in his drowsily placid way. She was pretty. No doubt about that. Nice eyes and mouth. A trim figure, and well-chosen clothes that suited her to perfection.

Mr. Teal thought of the Saint. The Saint, with his gay, devil-may-care face, his dancing blue eyes, and reckless smile, would have found no difficulty in waltzing into any woman's heart. True, Teal knew that the Saint was theoretically attached to a certain Patricia Holm; but Teal had never thought the Saint was a man to confuse fidelity with fun. Maybe there would have been some excuse for Pamela Marlowe.

"You seem to be rather interested in Templar," murmured Mr. Teal. "Are you in love with him, by any chance?"

"No. Whatever made you ask that?"

"It just occurred to me."

After a few minutes' desultory conversation he left her.

Pamela was horribly puzzled. What was the closely guarded secret of Vanney's, and what part was Simon Templar playing in it? Everything she had seen or heard pointed to the secret being a sinister one; and yet, however suspicious a character Simon Templar might be, he had one of the least sinister personalities that she had ever met. But why did so many irregular things mark the conduct of the office which was under his supervision?

Her brain seethed with unanswerable questions as she returned home.

"Talking of disappearance, Mr. Teal," said Sergeant Barrow—"I've been thinking."

"Another bright idea!"

"What's more," continued Barrow, "I've been having a word with Jones and the Records Office, and I've got on to something that might interest you."

Mr. Teal controlled his impatience.

"About the time that Connell disappeared Red Mulligan also vanished. The last thing we hear of Red, he was supposed to be dying of pleurisy. Red was the man who worked

the Finchley bank job. He and Long Harry used to run together, and they shared a room in Deptford. Connell made a trio when it suited him. Well, Connell disappears, and a few days after that we stop hearing anything about Red. I went down to Deptford and made a few inquiries, but all they could tell me was that Harry gave out a story that Red had got better and gone out to Australia. Now, does a man who's been given up for dead get better as quickly as that, and would he jump right off his bed into a steamer, and shoot off without saying a word to anyone? It's not as if there was anything against him at that time—he had a clean sheet."

"That's worth thinking about," conceded Inspector Teal. "Now, go out into the wide world, Barrow, and find me an Australian."

After some search an Australian was found, and Teal took him out, bought his beer, and invited a geography lesson. Then he bought the Australian more beer, and left him.

He went to Vanney's, and the Saint saw him at once.

"I'm looking for a man named Connell," said Teal.

"Everybody seems to be doing it," sighed the Saint. "Only yesterday we had a man asking for him."

"Long Harry?" asked Teal, and Simon nodded.

"It's surprising how popular a man can become, all of a sudden."

"Connell's wanted for the Battersea murder."

Clearly the Saint was surprised at this item of news, but this did not make him any more helpful. "Connell is the mystery man of the twentieth century," he said. "Sorry, Teal, but you've come to the wrong shop."

"Another thing: we've got a man in for a bit of work in Curzon Street, and he's made a confession that might put us on to a man we've been looking for for years. I'm temporarily stuck, and you might be able to help me."

"Anything within reason, Claude Eustace."

"The point is that this case links up with one in Australia. The trouble is, we haven't the name of the man who was robbed, and I'm wondering if Mr. Vanney could save me the trouble of cabling out to Australia for it. I believe he spent some years in Melbourne."

"That's so."

"Then he might know the name. He's one of the richest men in Melbourne, and I'm told he's got the swellest house in the place. The man I've got couldn't remember the name, but he thinks it began with an 'S'. He recalls that it's a big white stone building at the top of Collins Street, about five minutes from Brighton Beach. The family used to dash down to the sea for a dip every morning before breakfast, and it was while they were out on one of these early swimming parties that the jewels were stolen."

"It's some time since Mr. Vanney was in Melbourne," said the Saint, looking up doubtfully.

"He couldn't help knowing the place."

"I'll ask him, but I doubt if he can help you. Shall I write and let you know what he says?"

"I can get a reply telegraphed from Melbourne quicker than that. Couldn't you ask him now?"

"I'll see," said the Saint, and went. He was back in two minutes. "Mr. Vanney is very sorry, but he can't remember the name of the man. He knows the house, of course, but he thinks the man's name began with an 'M'."

"Thanks," said Teal, and heaved his vast bulk out of the chair. "Sorry to have troubled you." He returned to Scotland Yard, and sent again for Sergeant Barrow.

"Did you look up all the papers connected with the Stenning case, as I told you?" he asked.

Barrow pointed to a bundle recently placed on Teal's desk but Teal preferred to cut his work down to a minimum. "Have you studied the case? he asked.

"Yes."

"Tell me about it."

Stenning was clever. For years he had sailed perilously near the wind, and he had found it a profitable procedure. But with the passing of time, the encouraging recollection of past successes, and the temptation to increase his income still further by risking sailing manoeuvers closer to the wind, had led him to form companies of increasing instability. He had ended up by organising and directing a project which, for the first time in his career, was flagrantly fraudulent. The result had been to raise his conjectured profits to the seven-figure mark, although at his death his estate was valued at no more than £10,000.

"No man," said Sergeant Barrow, "ever died at a more convenient time."

One night he had set out from London in an open car, accompanied only by his chauffeur, to keep a business appointment at Bristol. He never returned. The car had skidded and overturned on a lonely stretch of road between Basingstoke and Andover. The chauffeur, Arthur Wylie, was flung clear, but Stenning had been pinned underneath the wreckage, and before the chauffeur could go to his assistance, the car had burst into flames, so that it was impossible to approach it. The car was reduced to a heap of twisted scrap-iron, and of Stenning there remained nothing but a corpse charred beyond recognition, and identified only by a ring, a watch, and a bunch of keys. The chauffeur pleaded inexperience, and it was found that he had only held a driving license for six months.

A verdict of accidental death was returned, and Stenning was buried in dishonor, for upon his death the full story of all his shady transactions was made public. But of the million he was reputed to have amassed in the course of his career as a swindler, no trace could be discovered.

"That's the story," said Sergeant

Barrow. "But what's it got to do with Connell?"

"Nothing, and at the same time everything. And now, if you will listen carefully, I'll tell you a little joke."

Sergeant Barrow produced a smile.

"The joke is about a man who says that he lived several years in Australia, and who gives Melbourne as his last address. I asked him if he could identify a house at the top of Collins Street, five minutes from Brighton Beach, and I told him how the people who owned the house used to run down to the sea for a bathe before breakfast."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Teal, but I don't see it."

"Suppose that I told you that I'd got a beautiful house in Kensington Gardens overlooking the Embankment. What would you say then?"

"I should say you were a liar, Mr. Teal."

"I said nothing so insulting. In fact, I said nothing at all. But since the Australian you found me gave me his word that Brighton Beach was at least ten miles away from the top of Collins Street, Melbourne, I was justified in thinking a lot."

The Saint summoned his secretary, dictated one of his usual frivolous notes to the Editor of *The Times*, and then asked, half-quizzically, half-seriously: "I wonder why they never print my letters?"

"Because," said Pamela Marlowe calmly, "I never send them."

"This is very like insubordination. However, I suppose you know best. Let's change the subject. Have you got any more complaints to make against the firm?"

"What did Mr. Teal mean by talking about Mr. Vanney making childish attempts to kill him?" she asked, and Simon put down his pen and leaned back comfortably.

"Owing to the recent boom in television," he explained, "the public have come to regard it as essential that their detectives should lead dangerous lives, in imminent peril of crafty assassination. To meet the popular demand, the proprietors of the leading newspapers have been compelled to organise private squads of thugs, who at intervals attempt the life of a well-known detective and thereby provide headlines for the front page. The detectives take all this in good part; but they do insist on a certain standard of efficiency about the murders, and when the attempt is below par they feel annoyed."

Pamela Marlowe went back to her table and began to pound the typewriter with unnecessary violence.

Simon Templar leaned back, lighted a cigarette, and proceeded to smoke meditatively. Then, brusquely, he left his chair and came and stood beside her. "Pamela," he said, holding out his hand, "let's call it a day."

"Very well, Mr. Templar."

Simon looked at the hand she had studiously ignored, sighed and returned to his desk.

He had lunch that day with two friends, and the conversation was not particularly inspiring. It was not until the end of the meal that he chose to liven things up.

"Boys," he said, "we have fortified ourselves with an excellent lunch. Our friend Connell has demonstrated a hidden talent for cheffery which has been a delightful surprise; and the B & B is on the sideboard in case any of you want bracing up another notch. Help yourselves if you think you need it, because I've got a shock for you."

Connell accepted the suggestion, but the other man did not move.

"The first point," said the Saint, settling himself, "is that this party is likely to break up without notice. The second point is that the boodle should all be in within a week; and if we can only keep our nerves and hang on, we've got a sporting chance of scooping the kitty. The pool isn't as large as it might have been, but that's not our fault. We're being rushed on the last lap, and we've got to make the best of it."

He blew two smoke rings and watched them float upwards.

"Maybe you haven't realised how short our time's getting," he went on. "Teal's on us—that's for sure. He caught us all nicely on the hop over that Melbourne inquiry. If I had tried to stall him it'd only have made a suspicion turn into a certainty. Teal knows that Vanney's a fake, as far as his Australian career is concerned anyway, but that's not a crime in itself. However, there are one or two other things."

The Saint stood up, assuming leadership quite naturally.

"There's been some funny stuff about Connell and Long Harry," he said, "and it's new to me. Harry was shopped for busting a house in Bayswater. So at least he maintains, and I'm inclined to believe him. He's just out of Pentonville and is looking for Connell. And Teal told me the other day that Connell was wanted for a job in Battersea. Now, I know Connell had nothing to do with it. Therefore Connell's been framed too. Now, what's the point of all this framing business?"

"They must have shopped me," growled Connell.

"Get that idea right out of your head, son," advised the Saint. "Teal knew Harry thought you'd shopped him in Bayswater, and the first thing he'd think of would be that Harry might have tried to return the compliment and shop you. Teal must have had something to make him quite certain that Harry didn't do the Battersea job, or else he'd have had Harry inside in a brace of shakes."

He paused; then: "But that's no particular concern of mine," he continued. "Now listen. This business of trying to bump off Teal must stop. If he makes any more complaints of that sort, Simon Templar goes out of this partnership at once. Finally, any monkeying about with Miss Marlowe will also stop. I've let you off once,

James Arthur Vanney; but I don't know if I made it quite plain then, that the next time you try to be funny with her you will not be let off. Keep your paws off her. That's all."

The bearded man began to bluster, but the Saint cut him short. "Do as you're told, or——." There was murder in Simon's eyes.

Inspector Teal, having had his dinner, was working in his office at ten o'clock when a messenger entered.

"There's a question through from C Division," said the man. "Connell's been seen in Soho tonight, and they want to know whether they're to pull him or tail him, or what."

"Tail him till I arrive: I've got an idea."

He spent twenty minutes in an other room, and when he emerged the change in his appearance was amazing. He had adopted the character of a shady race-course hanger-on.

At Marlborough Street Police Station he was told that the last report from the men who were keeping track of Connell had placed him in a public-house in Shaftesbury Avenue. Arrived there, Teal was met by a detective who told him that the man had moved on to a night club.

The other detective was lounging against the side of a taxicab outside, talking to the driver. The sign he gave Teal would have been unnoticed by a casual observer, but it was enough. Teal went in. He had no difficulty in this, for in his pocket was a collection of membership cards which would have gained him admittance to any night club in London.

He saw his man as soon as he entered the room and established himself in a corner a few tables away.

Sipping the drink which was brought him, he watched Connell covertly.

Connell was there without any attempt at disguise. Gathered together at his table were three or four men whose appearances were decidedly against them. Two of them Teal recognised. There was the usual leavening of "dancing partners".

The party was a hilarious one, and Connell was leading every outburst of merriment. Every drink was on him —one round had hardly arrived before he was shouting for another— and he paid for them from a huge roll of Bank of England notes.

"Drink up!" he shouted at intervals. "I'm on a good thing, and this is my night out."

Teal watched for an hour, and when the party quietened down into a sodden stupor he judged it was his turn to take a hand.

Taking a pencil and an envelope from his pocket, he scribbled a note: "If you want to make some more easy money, don't say anything to anybody, but follow me out of here."

"Slip that to the gentleman over there," said Teal to a passing waiter, and pointed out Connell.

Connell read the note, and Teal caught his eye. Then the detective rose and walked towards the exit.

Connell caught up in the street.

"What's this?" he demanded, brandishing the envelope.

Teal took it from him.

"I want you to do a job for me," he said. "There's a place just up the road where we can talk without being disturbed. It's worth a hundred to you. Are you on?"

Connell swayed, and steadied himself.

"Let's hear," he said, and Teal took his arm and walked him up the road.

In half an hour Connell was back at the club calling for more drinks, but Teal did not return. He went back to Scotland Yard, changed into his ordinary clothes, and went home to bed.

He retailed the encounter to Sergeant Barrow the next morning.

"I asked him if he could drive a car, and he said he could. Then I asked him if he could do tricks with one, and he asked me what I meant. I told him I'd got a down on a man and I wanted him messed up in an accidental sort of way. 'This man's given his chauffeur notice,' I said, 'and I can get you the job, references and all, in any name you like. If you're a fool, you'll land yourself for dangerous driving; but if you're clever, maybe you can get away with it and draw the hundred I'm offering.' He was in a boastful mood, and he said he could make a car eat out of his hand and turn somersaults just when he wanted it to. I arranged to meet him at the same place in two days' time, with the money, and that was that."

"And?" prompted Sergeant Barrow.

"And," said Mr. Teal, with languid satisfaction, "I think that tells me all I want to know about the later history of Mulligan; and how Stenning managed to die so successfully.

Altogether it was a successful twenty-four hours for Mr. Teal; for a few minutes later the man he had set to tail Connell home arrived with his report, and another mystery was well on its way to solution.

Mr. Teal now had a very good idea why the Saint had been going out to lunch so infrequently, and this further progress increased his conviction that things would shortly commence to hum.

At twelve o'clock on a certain morning, Simon Templar made a decision. This brightened him perceptibly. His pencil went flying across the room into a corner, the blotting-paper was screwed up into a ball and hurled into the waste-paper basket with the gesture of a challenger throwing down the gauntlet, and his feet returned to their usual position on top of the desk.

"I've got it," he said triumphantly.

"Badly, I should say," agreed Pamela, but he refused to be suppressed.

"Since lunch-time yesterday," he explained solemnly, "I have been tormented by visions of helpless orphans struggling to make their way in the world, with no mother to spank them and no father to borrow fivers from.

I think something ought to be done about it. Don't you?"

"Are you going to start an orphanage?" she asked.

The Saint stroked his chin.

"Not exactly," he replied gravely, "I'm starting a fund for distressed orphans, and the fund will be used to help deserving cases to end their days in the luxury to which the hardships of their early years have entitled them. I am an orphan," he added absently.

Clearly he was bursting with some big scheme, but he was too intent upon it to waste time elaborating any more fantastic explanations.

He plumped down in his chair, and rang the bell marked "Secretary."

"Take a letter," he said. "This is to Rolands and Battersby, 240 Threadneedle Street. Dear Sirs,—With reference to your advertisement of a thousand-ton ocean-going motor-cruiser, in the current issue of *Yachting*, I'll buy the darned thing at the price mentioned. Paragraph. I understand that the said hooker is at present lying in Southampton Water. Stop. You will kindly rake up a crew, shove them on board, and tell them to shoot the old tub along to Gravesend. Stop. This must be done immediately, as I am likely to be leaving on short notice. Stop. Communicate these instructions to Southampton by telephone, and drum it into the fat heads of the big stiffs at the other end of the line that the barnacled barge aforesaid has got to arrive at Gravesend within forty-eight hours of your receipt of this letter. Yours faithfully. Turn that into respectable business English, and type it on plain paper. Vanney's," he said, "will shortly know me no more. Observe my tears."

"Are you serious?" she asked.

"I was never more serious in my life," answered the Saint.

"You are leaving Vanney's?"

The Saint smiled.

"Certainly there's going to be a break in the partnership," he said. "But whether I shall leave Vanney's or Vanney's will leave me remains to be seen."

Business had been getting brisker every day, and that afternoon established a new record. Simon spent the whole of his time in a whirl of letters, telegrams, and telephone conversations, and he had no leisure in which to give vent to the high spirits which otherwise he would have enjoyed indulging.

With a number of late nights behind him, and the prospect of tiring days ahead, he had intended to go to bed early that night; but unfortunately for that plan, when he was half undressed, he was smitten with an idea. With the Saint, to conceive an idea and to put it into execution were things so closely consecutive as to be almost simultaneous. He sighed, dressed again, and went out.

The next morning, however, he showed no trace of tiredness as he ran up the stairs to the office.

He was always the first to arrive, as only Vanney and himself and one

other man held the keys, and the other two were invariably late. He was feeling cheerful that morning as he let himself in, but the gay humming died swiftly on his lips as he endeavoured to extract the key from the lock.

He twisted, pulled, and wrenched, and eventually it came away. Then he looked at the lock, and discovered the reason for the jam. It was a Yale, and it took him no more than ten seconds' expert investigation to see and appreciate how neatly it had been broken.

He went quickly through the offices—waiting-room, clerks' room, and his own room. The communicating doors were all open. He might have left them like that himself, but one door was open which he had never by any chance forgotten to close, and that was the door between his own office and the room marked "Private".

He passed quickly through, and what he saw made him pull up suddenly with his face gone strangely stern.

Facing him on either side of the fireplace, were two tall cupboards, which were kept locked. Presumably they were used for storing the private files of the company. But since nobody except himself and his partners ever entered the room, the question was never a subject for curiosity and comment. Now both the cupboards had been roughly broken open, and the doors sagged wide, showing the interiors.

One was empty. The intruder, whoever he was, had drawn blank with his first guess. The other was also empty; but instead of the wooden back, which one might have expected to see, there was clearly visible the raw brickwork of the wall, and this had been broken away so that there was a large gap through which a man could easily pass. On the other side of this gap was a curtain, which had been drawn aside, and though the hole in the wall could be seen a room.

The Saint stood still for a long time. Then he took out his cigarette-case, and very slowly and calmly selected and lighted a cigarette. With this in his mouth he strolled forward, pushed through the doors of the right-hand cupboard, ducked through the aperture in the wall, and came out into the room beyond. It was furnished as a sitting-room, with a safe in one corner and a writing-desk in another. The safe had been smashed by an expert, and its heavy door stood wide open—a battered and drunken-looking apology for a door. Papers were strewn about the floor. The writing-desk was in a similar state of disrepair; every drawer had been forced, and the contents were scattered over it, around it, and across the carpet.

After what he had already seen, these catastrophes were of minor importance, and even the litter failed to exasperate his tidy instincts. Moving very slowly and deliberately, he examined the rest of the flat, and found that no part of it which might

constitute a hiding-place had been overlooked.

The Saint smiled faintly, but it was not because he was amused.

He went back into Vanney's office, pulled the cupboard doors to, and returned to his own room, closing the door marked "Private" carefully behind him.

When Pamela Marlowe arrived he was comfortably blowing smoke-rings, and no one would have known from his expression what a jar he had received.

She sat down, and it was some time before he became aware that she was expecting him to do something. He pulled himself together with an effort.

"Oh yes, the letters," he murmured, and swept the pile before him neatly into a drawer. "I've already opened those, and there's nothing to attend to yet."

He played a tatoo on the desk with a pencil.

"By the way," he said casually, "I'm giving you a week's notice, though the necessity for your services may cease to exist before then."

It was some moments before she could recover from her surprise.

"Why?" she stammered. "Isn't my work satisfactory?"

"Perfectly, sweetheart," he said. "But the firm you work for isn't. Later on in the day I shall be giving myself notice, so you needn't think you are the only victim. You will receive three months' salary in lieu of however much longer notice you thought you were entitled to, and a further three months' salary instead of a reference. The procedure may seem strange to you, but it is dictated by my wishes for your welfare. You could have a reference if you wanted one, but it would be quite useless. The money I spoke of has already been paid into your bank account, and you will receive confirmation of that from them as soon as the cheque has been passed through."

"But surely," said Pamela blankly, "six months' salary isn't necessary in lieu of notice and a reference?"

"The firm of Vanney," answered the Saint, "although eccentric to the point of being crooked, has a reputation for generosity to maintain. I've just started to give it that reputation, and you are the first beneficiary."

She hesitated.

"It's very kind of you," she said at length. "But since the money has already been paid over, you must have known that this was going to happen."

"I did," he replied. "But I wasn't sure exactly when. I discovered this morning that it was going to happen today."

Pamela looked straight at him.

"Simon," she said, "since I'm leaving Vanney's, and this looks like being the last eccentricity I shall have to puzzle over, is it any use asking you to give me the real reason for it?"

The Saint stood up. He was quite serious.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I've stopped

playing the fool from this moment. So I'll just say that it's impossible to answer your question to-day. Tomorrow, perhaps . . ."

The last words were spoken almost in a whisper, and he was standing quite still with his head bent slightly forward, as though listening.

"One moment," he said and went quickly into Vanney's office.

"George," said the Saint quickly, to the porter, "yours not to reason why, yours promptly to fly. In English, pull out of here right away. You also, my king beaver"—this to Vanney. "Go away and sit down and open your hearts to each other. And wait till I come back—it will be within two hours."

He returned to his own office, taking no notice of Pamela; jerked his hat down from the rack, and went out.

A taxi took him to Upper Berkeley Mews. It was there that Teal found him an hour later. There was a half-filled suitcase on the table, and the Saint, having admitted the detective, returned unconcernedly to the task of trying to close the lid of a trunk that was already crammed to bursting point. A selection of clothes was laid out on the bed, and every chair in the room was similarly loaded.

Teal surveyed the disorder thoughtfully.

"Where are you going, Saint?" he inquired.

"Where am I going, old dear? Well, that isn't decided yet. I may be going abroad, or I may not—it just depends on how things turn out."

Teal did not seem surprised.

"That's what I came to see you about," he remarked. "I suppose there's no chance of your putting in a bit of Evidence?"

"Teal," said the Saint, "surely you know me better than that!"

The detective sighed.

"Unfortunately I do," he said. "But I was told to try it."

He picked up his hat.

"There are some men who say 'No', he observed, "and you wonder whether they mean 'Yes'. You don't say yes or no, but one always knows what you mean. Sorry to have troubled you."

"The last man who said that to me," remarked the Saint reminiscently, "is one of the only two possible starters for the Great Burglary Sweepstakes. Tell me, do you boys ever indulge in what you might call judicially sanctioned crime?"

"Not that I know of."

"I just wondered," said the Saint. "Now I know. It must have been Harry."

Teal put down his hat again. If he had not been so obviously incapable of such contortions, one would have said that he pricked up his ears.

"Harry?" he repeated.

"The same. But if you think you're going to get anything out of me before you've got me in the dock, you may have another guess free. Good

morning, Claud—and don't forget to close the door as you go out."

Obediently, Teal went to the door.

"By the way," he said from the threshold, "you were working late at the office last night, Saint."

"I was," said Simon, folding a dinner-jacket. "What about it?"

"I made some inquiries, and I found that the rule in those offices is that everyone must be out of them by eight o'clock."

"True," said the Saint. "But since Mr. Vanney owns not only the offices but the whole block of flats as well, and since he made that rule, I think one may say that he and his staff are allowed to break it. Goodbye."

"See you again soon," said Teal, and went.

The two hours which the gentleman known as George and the King Beaver had been told to wait had expired to the minute when Simon Templar returned. He knew that he had been followed from Upper Berkeley Mews back to the office, but he was not bothering about such trifling troubles.

He walked quickly down the corridor and turned into his own room.

It was empty.

With a grim foreboding, the Saint swung round on his heel and flung open the door leading into the clerks' room.

"Anybody seen or heard of Miss Marlowe?" he observed.

They had not.

"You're an idle bunch, and you know it," Simon rapped back. "Don't waste your breath telling me you were so busy working you couldn't hear anything, because I shan't believe it. She couldn't have left the office without you hearing the door close. Have you heard her go out?"

They had not.

"Right," said the Saint violently, and closed the door with a contrasting gentleness.

He went through into Vanney's room, closing the door behind him, passed through the cupboard and the wall beyond, and entered the flat. There was only one man there.

"Stenning," said the Saint, "I want to know where Pamela Marlowe is, and I want to know it quick!"

"Miss Marlowe?" repeated the big man blankly.

"You heard me the first time," snapped the Saint.

"I don't know anything about her."

Simon put his hands in his pockets.

"You're a liar and a dog, Stenning, my man," he said. "But I'll settle that account later. Where's your partner in crime?"

The Saint looked round the room.

"He was here when I left you," he said. "He can't have gone without your knowing—unless you weren't here yourself. Which is it?"

Stenning rose.

"I left him," he said.

"I told you to stay here."

"And I chose to leave. Have you anything to say?"

"A mouthful," said the Saint, "but that'll wait. Where did you go?"

"I went out to buy a bottle of whisky, if you want to know."

Simon's glance fell on the table.

"I see. Well, we'll come to that in due course. I'm only putting it off because I think that when I've finished my interview with you, you'll be more disposed to tell me all the things I want to know about Connell."

He flung some papers on the table.

"Take a look at those," he said.

Stenning looked.

"A cheque for twenty thousand pounds, which only needs your signature to make it worth that amount, payable to Miss Pamela Marlowe. That is the sum of twelve thousand pounds which you swindled off her father, plus a sum of interest which, I grant you, is extortionate, but which you will pay all the same. A receipt for that sum, signed by Miss Marlowe. I know it'll pass in a court of law, because I forged the signature myself. You may keep it as a souvenir. Also, there's a cheque for fifty thousand pounds, payable to myself, for which I am afraid I omitted to provide a receipt. I'll address it to you on Dartmoor, if you think you'd like something to remember me by."

Stenning's mouth twisted.

"And how do you think you're going to make me sign?"

"Moral persuasion," said the Saint. "Reinforced, if necessary, by physical. Take your pen and follow the dotted lines."

Stenning laughed.

"You're mad," he said.

"Absolutely," agreed the Saint, cordially. "Sign, please."

Stenning sneered.

"I refuse."

"Right," said the Saint. "If you maintain your refusal, I shall be compelled to inflict divers unpleasant forms of physical violence on your person. But before I start, I'll tell you something. Do what you're told, and I'll fade out of the picture and say nothing. Without my assistance the firm of Vanney will probably be seriously handicapped, but I can't help that. I'll get out, and nothing will be said. But don't sign, and the firm of Vanney will be shown up within an hour. Teal's on to you already, but if he's got to make his own way he can't get going in time to stop your getaway—if you're quick enough. But if I help him, there'll be a nasty cold cell waiting for you, Stenning."

Stenning sat down. He seemed to be enjoying the joke.

"Templar," he said, "that one's too old for me. I know the game as well as you do, and I tell you it won't work. There are two things to stop your squealing. One is that if you squeal you'll be in the same boat with the rest of us. The other is that even if you squeal, that won't make me sign."

"Granted," said the Saint. "There are two answers to that. One is that I planned this little meeting, and everything is plotted out on my timetable to the last minute. Within one hour Teal could have all the evidence he needs, and I can be away and out on the high seas. Can you say the same?"

Stenning made no answer.

"The second," said the Saint, "is that even if putting you away for at least ten years' penal servitude won't make you pay Miss Marlowe back that money, it'll be the least I can do for her by way of compensation. I'll do it cheerfully—don't make any mistake about that, Beautiful."

The other showed his teeth.

"You rat!" he snarled.

"Your name," said the Saint calmly, "is Mug. It is my distressing duty to have to tell you that you've been had. Your leg has been pulled to such an extent that it you wanted to pose for your portrait with one foot in the grave and the other kicking the cobwebs off the roof of the Empire State Building, it would have to be a damned deep grave." The Saint smiled with a beautifully cherubic magnificence.

Stenning sat quite still.

"You seem," said the Saint, "to have thought that I'd change my habits for your especial benefit. And that was your gravest error. It wasn't very long ago, when I was travelling round the wilds of South America, that I met Arthur Wylie. A good soul, but talkative when he had absorbed the best part of a bottle of Peter Dawson. That's how I learnt all about your fake death. Wylie told me how Connell and Long Harry raked up Red Mulligan for you—who, most fortunately for your purposes, had just decided to die, and who, still more considerately, had contrived to end up his useless days with much the same build as yourself. I came back with your dossiers all locked up in the trunk marked 'Not Wanted on Voyage'—and then you had to let me in. And I know everything that's happened in this firm since I joined it. Long Harry's sphere of usefulness passed over, but he guessed a lot. You framed him for a job in Bayswater, but it wasn't your fault that the man didn't die and so put Harry out of the way for ever. Connell stayed in the partnership, but he was always a danger. Because he's a mug, it took him some time to realise how important he was. But you know as well as I do that he was starting to realise that he held the whip hand; and what's more, he had started to put the screws on, feeling his way. You disposed of that—by fixing him for a job in Battersea. That time, you made a mistake about the murder. After that, I expect you felt safer, because if Connell started to get any more uppish you would have a very good way of putting him back in his place."

Stenning remained motionless in his chair, hunched up. His face had gone pale; and in that set, pallid mask, his eyes glowed with hate. The Saint, lounging against the table, went on speaking in the same calm, level tones.

"You were clever," he admitted. "You even realised that since Harry was out and was known to be looking for Connell, Harry might be pulled in by mistake for the Battersea job. Knowing your man, you sent Harry money, and, as you expected, he got

very tight on it, and was arrested, thereby establishing his alibi beyond all dispute. In fact, the whole show was a really brilliant piece of work, but you went off the rails badly when you began to think you were sitting pretty with the Saint playing a hand in the game. Did you really think I'd change my habits so much, dear heart, as to want to share the profits in any swindle with anyone—particularly with a flop-eared simoleon-toad like you? Now sign!"

"You're a fool!" said Stenning harshly. "Even if you make me sign, I could still stop the cheque."

"You couldn't," said the Saint. "Being a thoughtful sort of bird, I shall take care to put you in a place where you won't have a chance of stopping it until it has been paid."

"And even then," said Stenning, "I could recover the money because my signature was obtained under duress."

The Saint smiled beatifically.

"You'll have a job proving it," he murmured. "In any case, it won't be necessary, because you're going to sign that cheque voluntarily."

"Am I?"

"You certainly are," said the Saint. "Because if you don't sign it voluntarily, I shall now proceed to beat you up."

Stenning came to his feet again.

"You're going to beat me up, are you?"

"I am," drawled Simon, with a certain enthusiasm. "And it will be no ordinary beating-up. I'm an expert in the beating-up game, and I may mention that the mercy of a knock-out does not figure in my programme until—oh, well beyond the thirtieth round. It will be painful for you, and I'm afraid your face will be rather crudely damaged; but unfortunately I haven't any more subtle instruments of torture than my fists."

Stenning came round the table, and the Saint, who was unarmed but prepared for a display of armoury, divined the next move in the game before Stenning's hand had reached his hip-pocket. The toe of his right shoe caught the big man on the wrist as the automatic came into sight, and the force of the kick was shattering.

The Saint fell to the floor a second after the gun, and his legs flailing round in a scissors motion, knocked Stenning's feet from under him. Stenning went down with a crash, but Simon was up again in an instant with the automatic in his hand. He slipped it into his hip-pocket, and shed his coat as Stenning scrambled up again.

"The show devolves on me now—what?" he murmured. "That wrist of yours won't help you a lot."

The next instant Stenning was upon him.

It was not a pretty sight to watch, nor would any boxing referee have allowed it to continue for more than three seconds. Simon Templar was giving at least forty pounds away, and he was not prepared to take chances. The encounter lasted nine minutes by the clock, and at the end of that period Stenning went to the

floor for the eleventh time and stayed there.

"Up, Jenkins!" encouraged the Saint. "You're not nearly out yet, so it's no good shamming. The only Queensbury rule we haven't broken yet is the one which forbids rolling about on the floor fighting, but if you don't come up again quickly I'll break that rule, too."

Stenning came to a sitting position.

"I'll sign," he gasped.

The Saint took him by the collar, yanked him to his feet, and pushed him into a chair.

"Here's your pen, and here are the cheques," he said briskly. "Get on with it, because I'm in a hurry. And mind you don't drip blood all over them, because the bank might ask questions."

Simon examined the signatures, folded the cheques carefully, and put them in his pocket. His hair was tousled and his shirt torn, but he was breathing quite regularly. He felt ready to begin again any time, and in spirits he was completely unruffled.

"While I think of it, there's one thing more. Take your pen and write as I dictate. 'I, James Arthur Vanney, formerly known as Stenning, hereby confess—'"

"I refuse! You damned double-crosser—"

"I don't," said the Saint, "want any more unpleasantness. But if you are going to be obstinate—"

He took a step forward, and Stenning, seeing the look on his face, drew a clean sheet of paper hurriedly towards him.

The Saint dictated, and Stenning wrote; and when the confession was completed and signed, the Saint read it through carefully and stowed it away in his wallet.

"Now for Connell," he remarked. "Where is he, Stenning?"

The limp mess at the table buried its pulped face in its hand.

"You may as well know now—he's with Miss Marlowe."

"And where's that?"

"Downstairs. There are vaults under the building that I never told you about. The only way into them is from this flat. I had a private lift put in—I was going to use the cellars to hide in if the police got on to us and there was no time to make a bolt for it. Connell was putting the screws on—he said he must have the girl, and I helped him take her. They're down there now."

Simon took the automatic from his pocket, and thumbed back the safety catch.

"If anything's happened to her," he said, "you're certainly going to collect a bullet, my pet. Where is this lift?"

Stenning gestured weakly towards the wall.

"Press the panel next to that picture," he said.

Simon did so. The panel slipped back a fraction of an inch at his touch, and he waited. For a few moments it seemed as if nothing was going to happen. There was no sound,

but then a piece of panelling swung open with a click, and in front of him was a small lift. He stepped in, and the panelling closed behind him automatically.

In the wall of the lift were two switches. He tried one without result, but when he clicked over the other the lift began to move downwards.

Presently it stopped. In front of him was a gap in the shaft, hardly distinguishable in the darkness. He stepped out and then he was able to see better.

A tunnel ran to left of him. The paving, walls and ceiling were of stone, and the passage lost itself in darkness at either end. But a little way down to his right there was a space in the wall from which a faint light came. That must have been a branch tunnel, and since light came from it it seemed as if his search would not have to be a long one. He began to creep towards it, moving as silently as possible over the flags, but he had hardly taken two steps before a low hum from behind him made him swing round. He saw the lift by which he had just descended commencing to move upwards, and for an instant he weighed up in his mind the possibility of reaching it and checking its ascent; but the idea was no sooner formulated than it was discarded. That was Stenning, of course—he should have knocked him out completely, or tied him up—but it was too late to think of that now. For a moment again he thought of retracing his steps and waiting for Stenning to arrive, but before he could figure out the pros and cons of that scheme it was driven out of his head by a scream that shrilled and echoed hollowly down the passage.

He leapt towards the turning from which the light came. Another shorter tunnel stretched before him, dimly lighted by two flickering gas jets. At the end it appeared to open into a room so brightly lighted that at that point the gas jets must have given place to electricity. He could see a chair and the end of a table nothing else—but it was the only place from which the scream could have come.

Simon Templar was inside the room in a matter of seconds.

Pamela Marlowe was there, and so was Connell. Connell was holding her in his great arms. Pamela was struggling, but she was a child in Connell's terrific embrace. The Saint never took in more than the bare details of the scene. His hand gripped Connell's collar, and literally bounced the man off his feet.

"Connell, my man," said the Saint pleasantly, "that will be all from you."

Connell's fist came up like lightning; but Simon was even quicker, and the big man went sprawling against the wall from a mule-kick of a punch that carried every ounce of the Saint's weight and strength behind it.

Connell reeled and nearly fell. Then he came catapulting back to reply, like a jack-in-the-box. The

Saint side-stepped coolly, and landed an uppercut that started at his knees and travelled skywards with detonating force to impact smashingly on the point of Connell's jaw; and Connell went down like a log.

"The conventional situation at last, Pamela," said the Saint sadly, and he was just in time to catch her with his arm as she staggered.

In those few merry moments he had forgotten everything else, and he was brought back to reality with a jar that sent a stream of cold air whistling down his spine.

The sound was slight—no more than a subdued rattle that told of a lock being turned home. But the Saint heard it and whipped around—a few seconds too late.

What had been an unguarded way out back into the tunnel was now barred by a solid iron gate, and on the other side of the gate was Stenning—Stenning leaning weakly against the wall, with his face smashed to a jelly, and his coat spattered with blood, but Stenning vindictive and triumphant.

"Now will you squeal, Templar?" he croaked.

The Saint made no answer.

The nearest gas jet was directly over Stenning's head. Stenning reached up one hand, and the flame was extinguished. A faint hissing sound could be heard.

"Do you know what I've done, Templar?" asked Stenning shrilly.

The Saint's left arm was round the girl. With his right hand he was fumbling behind him.

But Stenning was taking no notice. Forcing his tortured body to obedience by the exercise of a tremendous effort of will, he was reeling back down the corridor, lurching from side to side like a drunken man, keeping himself erect half the time by resting against the wall, but dragging himself, somehow, to the other end of the corridor and the second gas jet. He reached it.

"Shall I tell you what I've done, Saint?" Stenning's voice came booming hollowly down the tunnel, and as he spoke his hand went up and found the tap he sought.

Simon knew then that the man was mad.

The last gas jet went out, and the hissing sound became louder. The only light in the corridor now was that which came from the electric bulb in the room in which Simon and the girl were imprisoned.

"I have turned on the gas," said Stenning.

And he laughed—a harsh, strident, demoniacal laugh. He was still laughing when the Saint shot him dead.

"The late lamented," murmured the Saint calmly.

After the shot the silence that followed was so unbroken that Simon could hear his own breathing. Stenning would never speak again, and Connell was out for a long time.

Slowly the Saint returned Stenning's automatic to his hip pocket. It was no use now. One glance at the massive lock on the barred gate,

which went from the floor to the top of the tunnel arch, told him that any attempt to shoot away the fastening would be wasted. Besides, with the gas continuing to escape, even the flash of a pistol would be enough to blow them all up.

He felt quite unperturbed. A tight corner like that never bothered him in his life, though he knew how thin his chances were.

He had thought that the girl had fainted, but he saw that her eyes were open. Even so, he did not let go of her.

"Sorry about this, old dear," said the Saint quietly.

She nodded. "I understand."

"They took you when I was away, of course," he said. "Something seems to have gone wrong with this conventional situation. Remind me to write to *The Times* about it when we get out."

He told her of the cheques he had made Stenning sign, and took one of them out of his pocket to show her.

"It may be of some use to your heirs and legatees—if you've made a will," he said cheerfully.

She looked up at him, steady-eyed; and it was not only that he was holding her, but she was holding on to him. At that moment, it seemed the most natural thing to do.

"Is there no hope?" she asked; and the old, reckless, Saintly smile was as swift and natural as ever.

"There's always hope," said the Saint. "Somehow or other I'm the most unsuccessful corpse that ever lived. Listen. I'd planned out everything I was going to do to-day. I wrote a complete account of everything I knew about Vanney—or Stenning, as he really was—and what I proposed to do about him, and left it at a District Messenger's office, addressed to Teal. They were to send it straight round to him at one o'clock, unless I cancelled the order by telephone. The motor boat is at Gravesend, as I ordered it, and by one o'clock, if anything unforeseen had gone wrong, I should have been miles away. What we have got to consider is whether we're likely to last long enough to give Teal time to get on the job. The gas will spread; it has to fill all the cellars. I don't know how big they are, but it will creep up all the same."

There was a long silence, and then the Saint said:

"Since the situation is working out in such a cheerful way, I think we ought to make the best of it."

She saw the mocking mischief in his eyes, and even in that hopeless impasse she found his bantering enchantment irresistible.

"Perhaps you are right," she said.

"In these matters, I am invariably right," said the Saint; and he kissed her.

Presently she seemed to grow heavier in his arms. He was stronger himself, and his mind was still clear, but his eyes felt strangely heavy, and his chest was starting to ache with the labour of trying to extract some life-giving oxygen from that poisoned air.

There was a rushing as of many waters in his ears, and it seemed as if a thousand trip-hammers were pounding on his brain.

He wondered if she was already gone, but then she spoke. It was no more than a whisper, but her voice seemed to come from a tremendous distance.

"Goodbye, Saint," she said.

The Saint laughed softly.

"Tell 'em to save a harp for me," he said, and kissed her again.

He was starting to feel very weak, and the room was swaying dizzily before his eyes. He lent against the wall, but he still held her with the last of his strength. It seemed to be getting dark, and he knew that he could not last much longer.

"There's a man to see you, sir," said Sergeant Barrow, entering the room.

Teal looked at the card, and read the note that accompanied it.

"Send him up," he said.

He started a fresh piece of chewing gum, and waited as though asleep. He remained in that attitude when the visitor was shown in, for his party manners were not his strong point.

"Go right ahead," said Teal, without opening his eyes.

The man sat down.

"The circumstances are rather peculiar," he explained. "At about eleven o'clock this morning a rather bulky letter was deposited at one of our branches, addressed to you with instructions that it was to be delivered at one o'clock unless the order was cancelled by telephone. It seemed a rather extraordinary proceeding to me at the time, especially as the address on the envelope told me that it was likely to be a message with some bearing on your professional activities. So after thinking it over, and taking the opinion of our head office by telephone, I decided that it was my duty to come here and see you at once."

"Have you the letter with you?" asked Teal.

"Naturally, I brought it along."

Teal stretched out his hand.

"Let's have a look at it," he suggested.

He had to open his eyes to read the address, and then he was suddenly galvanised into life. He sat up with a violence that made his chair, solid as it was, creak protestingly.

"The Saint!" he muttered. "I'd know that writing in a million."

"I hope I did the right thing," ventured the stranger.

"You did one of the best things you're ever likely to do in your life," said Teal, and pressed a bell on his desk.

"Barrow," said Teal, as his subordinate entered, "take this gentleman away, fill him up with whatever he likes to drink, and thank him profusely as you know how. I'm going to be busy!"

Left alone again, he sat down and ripped open the envelope. He read, and he read quickly, and in five minutes he was leaping down the stone

stairs in the direction of that wing of Scotland Yard which constitutes Cannon Row Police Station.

"Every man you've got, armed and at the double!" rapped Teal.

And the Sergeant in charge was so astonished at this display of energy and hustle on the part of his normally drowsy superior officer that the order was obeyed in what must have come close to record time.

At about half-past twelve, the keen observer might have noticed a number of burly men in plain clothes unostentatiously taking up positions round the block in which Vanney's stood. Teal circumnavigated the block himself, and made certain that every possible exit was watched. Then he went in alone.

A clerk met him in the waiting-room, but Teal had pushed past him before his business could be questioned. He went through the clerks' room, into Simon Templar's office, took in the emptiness of it at a glance, and went straight across to the door marked "Private". His hand was on the gun in his pocket as he walked in.

"Ah!" said Teal.

"One cupboard was still open as the Saint had left it, and Teal could see through into the disorder of the room beyond. He went forward cautiously, and squeezed through the hole in the wall.

There was a man in the room, and Teal had him in an iron grip before the other could be quite sure what was happening.

"I'll take you for a start, Harry," said Teal. "Now tell me what you've done with the rest of the gang, and tell me quick!"

Long Harry straightened up.

"I've been in this place all day," he said. "I bust in. I don't mind telling you that now. I was looking for Connell, or something that could tell me where he was, but I couldn't find him. So I waited. I hid in the bathroom. Templar came in early in the morning, saw the mess, and looked round, but he never saw me. Then Connell arrived, but he wasn't alone, and I didn't dare start anything with witnesses. I heard them talking. Then presently, after Templar had been in and spoken to them, Connell and the other man went out into the office and grabbed a girl who works in there. They had a blanket over her head, so I couldn't see who it was, but I was watching round the corner of the door and I saw Connell take her down."

"Down where?" snapped Teal.

"I'll tell you in a moment. Connell took her down, but the other man stayed here, and I didn't dare follow. Then Templar came in, and there was a fight. he knocked the other man out, and made him tell where Connell had taken the girl, and he went after her. Presently the other man followed. I waited, hoping Connell would come back alone. Then I heard something like a shot."

"Can't you get to the point?" snarled Teal. "Where did they go?"

"There," and Harry pointed.

Teal stared.

"I can't see anything."

"I'll show you," said Harry.

He went across and pressed a panel, as the Saint had done. Presently a larger piece of the panelling opened, and the lift was revealed.

Teal put his head inside, and stepped back quickly.

"Gas," he muttered. "For the love of mud, don't strike a match!"

He came back into the room and stood over Long Harry, who, taking the situation philosophically, had sat down comfortably in a chair to await removal to his home from home.

"Harry," said Teal, "would you like to improve your chances of getting off with a light sentence?"

"Tell me how, Mr. Teal!" replied Harry with alacrity.

"Go down out of here any way you like—there are busies at every door. Send them up after me, and tell them I've gone down in that lift. There's been something funny going on with all that gas about, and if you heard only one shot it means someone's likely to be in trouble. Now jump!"

Long Harry jumped.

Teal went into the bathroom, soaked his handkerchief under the tap, and tied it over his nose and mouth. Then he went back and entered the lift.

The door closed automatically behind him, and he was fortunate enough to find the right switch at his first attempt. The lift started to go down. With every yard of the descent the smell of gas, even through his wet handkerchief, grew worse, and Teal knew that he would not be able to live for long in that atmosphere. But he was a man without fear.

Presently the lift stopped, and he stepped out. He saw a faint light coming from the branch tunnel, and hurried towards it. At the end was a lighted room, and in one corner he could see the Saint sagging against the wall with Pamela Marlowe in his arms. With the fumes already starting to make their presence felt, Teal hurried forward.

He tried the iron gate, but it was immovable.

"Saint!" he roared.

The Saint's eyes half-opened dazedly, but Teal knew that he could see nothing.

"Saint," he belled again. "Where's the key?"

Simon's chest heaved, and Teal had to strain his ears to catch the reply. It came, with a fearful effort.

"Stenning's pocket—"

Teal went stumbling back down the corridor towards the inert figure that he had nearly tripped over on his first journey. He bent down, and fumbled with the man's pockets. The gas lay more heavily near the ground, and Teal wondered if he could hold out. But he found the bunch of keys, straightened up, and went staggering back down the tunnel. Somehow he found the lock. The gate opened. He was in time to catch the girl as the Saint fell.

By this time his heart was pounding furiously, and his head seemed to weigh a ton. Few men could have remained conscious and active for so

long, but Chief Inspector Teal was a giant in strength.

He picked the girl up as if she were a feather, and fireman's-lifted her on to his shoulder. He bent down again, and got an arm round the Saint. Carrying the girl, and dragging the Saint behind him, he began the terrible journey back along the tunnel to the lift. It was like a nightmare. At every step he seemed to grow weaker, and it was only by a superhuman effort of grim determination that he was able to move at all. He never knew how he accomplished the journey with his double load; but after what seemed an eternity of ineffective struggling he found the lift in front of him.

It would only hold two at a time. He dragged the girl in, and pressed the switch. The lift crept upwards.

At the end of a thousand years the bare wall of the lift turned into panelling, and the panelling sprang open in front of him; and Teal fell out of the lift into the arms of two of his men.

"Get her to a doctor," he gasped, and somehow reached the bathroom. He felt sick and weak and giddy, but he soaked his handkerchief again, replaced it, and went back to the lift. They tried to stop him, and then he was savage.

"The Saint's down there," he said, "and I owe him something. Let me go!"

This time the journey was not so difficult, for his short relief in the purer air of the room above had revived him a little, but there was a limit even to his endurance. He remembered dragging the Saint into the lift; he remembered pressing the button that started them on their upward journey; he remembered the beginning of the ascent. Then everything went black.

When he opened his eyes again, he was in bed. Looking to right and left, he saw a row of beds in which other men lay motionless. The room was almost in darkness, but in the dim twilight he saw nurses moving about, and a man in a white jacket was bending over the next cot. At the side of his own bed a nurse was sitting reading, but she looked up as soon as he moved.

"I gather that I'm not going to die," drawled Teal. But this time he spoke drowsily because he really felt drowsy.

The nurse smiled.

"You'll be back at work in a couple of days," she said cheerfully.

Teal sighed comfortably, and rolled over. As he did so, the doctor moved away from the next bed, and Teal saw who the patient was.

"How are you, Saint? said Teal.

"I'm fine," said the Saint. "Sorry, old dear."

"Remind me to arrest you when you're better," said Teal, and went to sleep.

Four days later, Mr. Teal, a trifle pale, but otherwise his old self, rang the bell of No. 7, Upper Berkeley

Mews, and the Saint answered the door himself.

"Why, it's old Claude Eustace," said the Saint. "Come right in!"

Teal came in.

"Say when," murmured Simon.

Teal said when.

"Cheerio!" said the Saint.

"Cheerio!" said Teal.

"By the way," said the Saint, "I believe you saved my life, and all that sort of thing. God bless you, damn your eyes!"

For the first time in his life, Mr. Teal looked embarrased, but he shook the hand which the Saint offered.

"And before I arrest you," said Teal presently, "why haven't you tried to jump for it on that boat you've got lying at Gravesend?"

"It didn't happen to be necessary," said the Saint. "I have a little story signed by the late James Arthur himself to show you. Take a look at it, and get ready to laugh."

Teal sat down and unwrapped a fresh packet of his favourite sweetmeat.

"This is our one consolation for having lost America," he remarked. "Let's see this confession. ."

The Saint passed over the paper. Teal read it through, and glowered.

"When did you write this?" he inquired.

"I didn't write it. Our one and only James Arthur wrote it. It'll stand any test. Sorry, I'm sure."

"You haven't by any chance got his signed permission to shoot him, have you?" asked the detective sardonically.

"Self-defence, old dear. Self-defence. Want to have it argued out in court?"

Teal sighed.

"And how's Connell?" asked the Saint.

"Enjoying a tropical climate, I should say," replied Teal dispassionately. "They got him up later, when the firemen had arrived with gas masks, but he was one of the deadest men I've ever seen."

The Saint lighted a cigarette.

"He was Vanney, of course," he said. "And at the same time he wasn't. It would have been too risky to let Stenning interview people that he had probably done business with before, although he had grown a moustache and made one or two little alterations to his face. But dressed up in livery, as George—a mere porter—nobody ever noticed him. There was a door opening right out of the private office to the passage, only a yard from his cubicle. When I went through to speak to Vanney, I went farther through, and spoke to George. When Vanney had to interview people I got my instructions from Stenning, and conducted most of the interview myself. Connell simply said 'Yes' and 'No' as I tipped him the wink.

Teal nodded.

I guessed all that.

"I don't suppose you'd have spotted us so soon if we had been able to keep Connell in order. He looked

great in a false beard, but he started getting uppish. He had to have money, and wanted more and more. We tried to keep him indoors in case he got tight and spilled the beans, but he got away the other night."

"I found him," said Teal. "He told me a lot that I wanted to know. It was clever the way he and Stenning arranged for that chauffeur to drive him and the body of Red Mulligan, recently deceased, into the country at night, upset the car, and have Wylie to swear that it was Stenning who had been killed. In fact, it was all very clever, but it wasn't good enough."

"It was good enough for me," said the Saint cheerfully.

"And what have you got out of it?"

"An untarnished reputation, and a glorious escape from the name of Tombs. You can have no idea how tired I was getting of that name."

There was a silence, during which Teal ruminated in a certain gloom.

He rose ponderously to his feet.

"Well," he said, "you seem to have done it again."

"I'm always doing it," said the Saint modestly.

They walked together to the door, but on the threshold Teal stopped and gave birth to the expression of his greatest worry.

"Saint," he said, "when you were locked up down in that cellar with Miss Marlowe—"

"Yes?"

"Wasn't it—er—um—Well, you know, I've only seen that sort of thing on the movies, but when I arrived you were—er—"

"Teal," said the Saint, "you're a naughty old man. Go home and read the *News of the World*."

And he closed the door gently, and left the detective blinking at a polished brass knocker of very doubtful respectability.

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## TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES IN LISTENING DEVICES

Recent developments in electronic listening devices include, it appears,—not only the conventional miniature wire recorder that fits snugly into your briefcase, and/or the telephone tap that will pick up a voice even when the phone receiver is *on* the hook.

Recent advances include a tiny portable transmitter, the size of a package of cigarettes, that can be taped under a desk and broadcast all conversations to a receiver a block or so away,—a six-foot directional gun microphone, with a telescope lens for sighting, that can pick up conversations in the street below from the sixth floor of a building,—and a directional horn-shaped listening device that will pick up a voice as far as one-quarter mile away.

# INTRIGUE AT PAOZAN

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

This is a story of Korea before the name of that unhappy land first brought a dread chill of premonition to Americans scanning casualty lists. It is the story of a Korea which then attracted only those Americans interested in digging gold, in selling oil, or in saving men's souls. It is the story of a handful of Americans in North Korea whom another power—the Japanese, that time—wanted very much to see elsewhere. specifically, it is the story of Henry Burr.

From Cheribon to Chingwantao, via ports, Henry Burr was called "Professor," althought there was nothing academic about his mephistophelian eyebrows, aquiline nose, or sugar-scoop chin. Henry Burr was definitely not a Ph.D. He was not even a piano player. He was a prestidigitator.

Why Professor Burr had come to the Orient in the first place was one of the mysteries of the Mysterious East. For more than a dozen years some inner compulsion, some combination of weltschmerz and wanderlust, had driven him in happy discontent from one colony of expatriates to another. Originally he travelled with such stage-filling apparatus as the Great Levitation Illusion, the Miraculous Duck Tubs, and the Cabinet of Cagliostro. One by one, however, his battered trunks were abandoned to exacting

Eurasian landladies of frowsy boarding houses from Shanghai to Penang, until he was reduced to a gold-fringed black-art table that folded like a music stand, the linking rings, a few colored-handkerchief effects, cigarette catching, and a pack of cards. His card manipulation sufficed for a week of evenings for entertainment-starved exiles, and a week of evenings was good for a month of board-and-lodging at almost any Haikwan or United Service Club. Even when the New Order in Eastern Asia began hampering his movements, the Professor had never considered returning home—until the advent of Mr. Dexter Pinnock.

Mr. Pinnock entered the life of Professor Henry Burr with a gust of cold wind one winter evening in Seoul. The professor was shivering slightly as he sat upon the oiled-paper floor-covering of his room in an odorous Korean inn near the crumbling city walls, waiting for his trousers to be returned by the Japanese tailor charged with removing the fringe from the bottom of the cuffs. The floor, of course, was the warmest part of a Korean inn, the fireplace occupying the outside of one wall, and the chimney the wall opposite, so that the smoke and hot air crossed under the house. This was the only reason the professor had chosen a Korean inn, inasmuch as he was rather sensitive to the scent of *kimshi,* pickled seaweed, and other aromatic byproducts of Korean cuisine and sanitary arrangements. Japanese inns had a nicer odor. The Japanese, however, still clung to the fallacious idea that a house could be heated by a charcoal brazier no larger than a pumpkin, and the professor would rather smell than freeze.

"Professor Burr, I believe?"

The professor jumped at the resonant greeting trumpeted behind him. He was not precisely a prepossessing spectacle in his shirt tails and long underwear, but his stage presence did not desert him. With perfect composure he arose and turned around. He nodded and passed his slender fingers over his long dark hair with its startling streak of silver which curved from the center of his forehead to the bulge in back.

"Pardon me," he said. "I was expecting my tailor."

Mr. Dexter Pinnock was obviously not a tailor. He was a hearty, ruddy-faced individual with no upper lip and a small, pointed potbelly that seemed to call for a fawn-colored vest and a heavy gold chain, although he wore neither. The self-confident manner with which he entered the room without knocking gave the impression that he was on the point of either buying or selling something extremely expensive. The professor felt vaguely that he had seen him somewhere before.

"I'm Dexter Pinnock," said Mr. Pinnock, opening his overcoat. "How do you do?"

The sound of the name and the sight of the fur lining established an immediate association. The professor remembered. Dexter Pinnock was generally believed to have been once engaged in manufacturing philatelic rarities in Yokohama, with a large staff of skillful and versatile Japanese engravers who on occasion could turn their hands from the Western Australia inverted-swan error to a reasonable facsimile of an American or British passport. When the rare-stamp market was depressed by the glut of curiosa and special issues that poured from Washington under Farley, Mr. Pinnock was reported to have closed his enterprise in Yokohame, muttering something about the unfair competition of Government in business. Lately he was understood to have prosperous connections with a Nagasaki firm engaged in converting *kanten*—a Japanese gelose made from seaweed—into imitation swallows' nests to be sold to undiscerning Chinese gourmets. Now that he thought of it, the professor remembered having Mr. Pinnock pointed out to him in a crowded barroom at Hankow by someone who said that Mr. Pinnock was establishing Yangtsze Valley agencies to handle his artificial birds' nests. The professor shuddered. A cold chill always ran down his spine whenever he thought of his last appearance in Hankow.

"I've been an admirer of yours for a long time, professor. Wanted to be a magician myself when I was a little fellow." Mr. Pinnock took off his coat and sat down. "I understand you're going to Paozan," he said.

Professor Burr blinked. He himself had never heard of Paozan until a few days ago, although it had been a curious self-contained little American colony since the turn of the century—a group of American mining engineers, executives, and hard-rock men and their wives, leading a typical American existence deep in the mountains of North Korea, digging gold under a concession granted by the last Korean king who liked Americans because an American had wired his palace for electric lights. Paozan was far from the beaten path, yet this stranger seemed singularly well informed.

"How did you know I was going to Paozan?" the professor asked.

"I have a friend up there in the gold mines. The Paozan Club bringing you up?"

"Yes. They want me to perform for some sort of celebration."

"It's for Bill Monday," said Mr. Pinnock. "He's been manager of the Paozan Gold Mines for twenty years, so the boys are going to give him a gold watch and a three-day picnic. I hear they're paying you only fifty yen and expenses."

The magician nodded.

Dexter Pinnock made clucking sounds with his tongue. "That's a crime," he said. "That's highway

robbery. A man of your caliber. They ought to be ashamed. Have you ever thought of going back to the States, where you'd be appreciated, professor?"

"I've been away such a long time," said Henry Burr.

"Nonsense. You ought to be in Hollywood. You ought to be in the Rainbow Room. You ought to have your own road company. I'm going to give you a steamer ticket home. Will a thousand dollars stake you?"

Henry Burr leaned against the wall and slowly moistened his lips. For what impossible or dishonest task," he inquired, "are you offering to bribe me?"

"Neither," said Mr. Pinnock. "All you have to do is to come from Sonora, California."

"I come from Omaha, Nebraska," said the professor.

"Temporarily you'll come from Sonora," Mr. Pinnock insisted. He took some folded newspapers from his pocket. "You can glance through these Sonora newspapers on the train. You won't be caught on anything recent. You haven't been home since you were a mere lad, but your brother still sends you the home town papers. Your brother, by the way, is Charles G. Burr, who has just bought a controlling interest in the Oriflamme mine near Sonora. You can read about it on Page 3."

Dexter Pinnock spread the newspaper, but the professor did not look at it. He glowered.

"This Charles G. Burr is no relative of mine," he said.

"This Charles G. Burr doesn't even exist," Pinnock said. "But the Sonora paper says he has a brother who is a noted sleight-of-hand performer now touring the Orient. I had that page made up specially for me in Tientsin day before yesterday. Rather a neat job, isn't it?"

Professor Burr took the paper, glanced at it, folded it carefully and handed it back to Mr. Pinnock. "I'm afraid," he said, "that I can't be party to any mining-stock swindle, Mr. Pinnock."

"But there's no swindle involved, I assure you, Professor," Mr. Pinnock objected. "All you have ot do is to leave the newspapers lying about conspicuously. They'll be devoured right down to the last halitosis ad, I can assure you. Then, of course, if anybody should mention the new mine-owner named Burr, you can speak lovingly of California and Sonora and God's country in general. That's all."

"And what nefarious end will that accomplish, Mr. Pinnock, that it should be worth a thousand dollars and a steamship ticket?"

Dexter Pinnock grinned slyly. "Well, if any one should ask you to intercede with your brother regarding a job in California," he said, "you might say that you have serious doubts whether a letter from you would carry the slightest influence, but you will offer to do what you can."

"I'm afraid, Mr. Pinnock, that I still don't see the point of all this, but I'm quite sure it's dishonest."

"Nonsense, professor. There is a slight deception involved, I admit, but deception is your stock in trade. The hand is quicker than the eye, and people pay you for it. They love it. So will Bill Monday and his wife love it when you remind them that they're really homesick and ought to go home."

"I take it that Bill Monday is no longer wanted as manager of the Paozan mines, but has an iron-clad contract. Who wants him to resign?"

"That's just a matter of internal politics," said Mr. Pinnock.

"I see. Of course if it's just a matter of internal politics . . ." Professor Henry Burr nodded understandingly. He wondered how Sixth Avenue looked with the El torn down, what the Battery was like without the Aquarium, and where variety actors loafed between bookings, now that the Hippodrome was gone; that wouldn't make any difference to magicians, of course; they were probably still swapping lies up at Max Holden's . . . A faraway look came into his eyes.

Dexter Pinnock humped his fur-lined coat about his shoulders like a bird of prey ruffling its feathers. He smiled broadly, extricated something from his inner pocket, closed his coat. His left hand gave Burr a smugly paternal pat on the arm while his right extended an oblong of paper. He said: "Here's my check for a thousand on the Bank of Chosen. You'll notice it's dated a week from today. Of course if you don't play ball during the next week—. Goodnight, professor, and good luck."

As he went out, Dexter Pinnock carefully placed the folded Sonora newspapers on the floor beside the professor.

The Seoul-Mukden Express panted impatiently at Kyong, nearest railway station to the Paozan mining camp. Professor Henry Burr stepped off the train, almost into the arms of two Korean coolies waiting to take his baggage. He smiled. He had never quite gotten used to the comic-opera costumes of the Korean male: The long, shapeless white tunic that almost covered the baggy white trousers; the narrow-brimmed hat like a truncated cone of woven black horse-hair, caging a twisted top-knot within its diaphanous mesh and tied under the chin with black ribbons.

"That all the baggage you've got?" asked a pleasant American voice, as the coolies picked up the professor's two scuffed bags.

The professor turned to confront a plump, pink-faced, white-haired man in high-laced boots and a Stetson.

"That's all," said the Professor. "I'm Henry Burr."

"Sure you are," said the white-

haired man. His blue eyes smiled a greeting as he extended his hand. "You're the only Occidental on the train, so who else would you be? But I thought you'd have at least a few crates of rabbits and top hats."

"I depend upon dexterity, not machinery," said Professor Burr with great dignity.

The white-haired man's smile wrinkled into a broad grin. "Sorry, old man," he said. "I'm Dan Philips, store-keeper at Paozan. Had breakfast?"

"No," said Professor Burr.

"The company maintains a sort of caravansarai down here. We'll go on over if you don't mind weak coffee and strong butter."

Professor Burr's diabolic eyebrows relaxed; Dan Philips' smile was infectious.

They walked through the village of mud huts with grass-thatched roofs and hollow logs for chimneys. They walked through the sparkle of frost toward the bare brown hills, clear and sharp in the cold morning air, to a white-washed frame cottage with a red roof. Within its alien American walls a Korean cook was stirring up faint aromas of coffee, kerosene and bacon grease. The familiar label on the milk tin, the worn pattern of the oil cloth on the table, the familiar smells, stabbed Henry Burr with a sharp pang of nostalgia. He knew suddenly that he was actually glad he would be going home soon . . .

"Better shove a few of those rubber biscuits in your pocket, professor," said Dan Philips, as they polished off the fried eggs. "We've got sixty miles of frozen ruts between us and lunch, and we may not get to the camp at the stroke of noon. I think I hear our limousine rattling outside."

The stage for the Paozan mines was a decrepit old jalopy evidently suffering from palsy complicated by asthma. Two Koreans were already seated in it. They said nothing to Philips or Burr, who in turn said nothing to each other for some time after the stage started. It was too cold for conversation.

Henry Burr had been watching a big Korean bull, loaded to twice its height with pine boughs for fuel, go charging off across ice-covered rice paddies with two floppy-trousered Koreans in hot pursuit. Now a panic-stricken cow, yoked to a two-wheeled cart, was galloping ahead of the stage, unheeding the cries of the woman who waddled in the dust cloud far behind. Burr was reminded of his boyhood in Nebraska, when horses still shied at automobiles. . . . He asked at last: "How long have you been at Paozan, Mr. Philips?"

"Better call me Dan, or they won't know who you're talking about," said Dan. "Why, I've been here for nearly nineteen years. I came the year after Bill Monday came. Only difference is Bill came to dig gold, and I . . . Well, you

might say I came to get away from the gold-diggers, in a sense—in a Broadway sense."

"I see," said the Professor. "New York?"

"More or less. And Palm Beach. Places like that. I guess nobody would remember me any more. Not in a kindly way, anyhow. I wouldn't blame them. I guess I was pretty much of a nuisance to friends and family and the human race in general."

"I see," said the professor. "Remittance man?"

"Not exactly," said Dan. "Nobody sent me away and nobody's been remitting to keep me away. It was my own idea. I had my own reasons. And I don't regret it. I like it up here. We've got a fine climate and a fine friendly crowd. I never go further away than Kyong any more. I used to run up to Tientsin occasionally, or down to Seoul, but every time I'd get drunk or sick or something so I stay home now. It is home, really. I hear you're from Sonora."

"Yes?"

"Bill and Jane Monday were going to ply you with questions about Sonora," Dan said. "Their boy has a job up that way. He just got out of mining school."

Henry Burr asked: "How did you know I was from Sonora?"

"I guess Anderson told us."

Burr remembered. Anderson was the man who had written him in Seoul about the engagement.

"How did he know?" Burr asked.

"Andy knows everything. He's No. 2 Yang-bang at the camp—Bill Monday's Man Friday, so to speak. He made all arrangements for the big party."

Professor Henry Burr shifted his position uncomfortably. The set of his mouth made his rictus creases particularly deep and tragic.

The stage rattled through more mud-and-straw hamlets, past gaping villagers, past women squatting beside holes in the frozen river washing clothes. The jalopy was coughing wearily toward the treeless crest of a rugged slope when Dan Philips took the professor's arm.

"Look," he said. "Just over the ridge. Paozan. Watch the driver swing to the other side of the road. Traffic moves to the right in Paozan—the only place in the Orient this side of the Philippines where a right-minded, right-handed American driver can be himself. Bill Monday made it that way."

Henry Burr leaned forward. In the valley below him was a Korean village that differed from other Korean villages only in that the roofs, instead of being thatched, were made of hammered-out oil tins and metal powder kegs. On the far slopes of the valley, however, was a neat array of white cottages with green roofs. There were trees here, too, some naked with winter, some somber evergreens. Had there been the white steeple of a church, Bill

Monday's town might have been a New England village. But there was no steeple. There was only the gallows-frame of the Paozan mine at the top of a rise, silhouetted sharply against the frosty blue of the sky.

Bill Monday, manager of the Paozan mine, put his arm around the slightly stooped shoulders of Professor Henry Burr and said: "Do the one with the ace of spades and the hard-boiled egg."

"Again?" asked the professor in mild surprise. He had already done the trick with the ace of spades and the hard-boiled egg at least six times since his arrival at Paozan. He had done it, of course, at his formal exhibition of legerdemain before the whole camp at the Paozan Mines Club, and during the three days following he had done it at the slightest provocation. After two cocktails Bill Monday always decided that the professor was a great benefactor of mankind and a genius, and that the trick with the ace of spades and the hard-boiled egg was a modern miracle. And tonight, just before dinner the Mondays were giving to all of their colleagues they could squeeze into the manager's cottage, Bill Monday was feeling particularly mellow with martinis, the accumulated sentimentality of twenty years' crowded into three days, and just general good fellowship.

"Sure, again. It's a good trick," said Bill. He was a big, crinkly-eyed, weather-beaten man with iron-gray hair and a shy smile. "I haven't seen it since last night."

Jane Monday detached herself from a laughing group of young foremen and sailed into the midst of the conversation. She was a homely woman, tall but certainly not stately. There was a frank amateurishness in the design of her low-cut lamé gown, no doubt the product of her own hands, and an obvious nonchalance in the way she fixed her hair. She moved with unaffected simplicity.

"Bill, stop pestering the professor," she said. "Dinner's going to be ready in a minute."

"Too early for Christmas dinner," said Bill.

"You with your Christmas in February," Jane Monday said.

"Sure, why not?" Bill countered. "This is Christmas dinner," he explained to the professor, "because with shipping all snarled up, we didn't get our Christmas puddings until after Christmas. So I made Jane save 'em for today. If the folks at home can have two Thanksgivings, why the dickens can't we have two Christmases?"

"Bill, take that cocktail shaker away from Dan Philips and make one more round. This is the last one or the pheasants will be ruined."

"I shot the pheasants myself," Bill said. "They're fine birds."

"Go on, Bill. Please. I don't know why you let Dan mix the drinks,

after you borrowed the bar boy from the club."

"Yong's busy in the kitchen. He's showing the cook how the professor does his tricks. The bar boy's a great admirer of yours, Professor." Bill winked. As he moved away, a tender look came into Jane Monday's gray eyes. For a moment she was almost handsome.

Professor Henry Burr was standing with his elbows on the mantel, looking at the blazing log. Jane came over to him.

"I've got a favor to ask of you, professor," she said, "and it's got nothing to do with the ace of spades and the hard-boiled egg."

"I hope I can help you."

Jane Monday hesitated. Then she said: "I've been reading those Sonora papers you lent Bill. I saw where a brother of yours has bought the Oriflamme mine. Do . . . do you suppose he might give Bill a job?"

"I really haven't much influence with my brother," said Burr flatly.

"Don't tell Bill I mentioned this," Jane said. "He knows I'm quite happy here. But he's been buried up here for twenty years, and I think he feels he ought to get back into the world before he's too old. And Bill Junior is working near Sonora now . . ."

"Yes, so I've heard," said Henry Burr.

"So, will you—" Jane broke off suddenly. Her husband was approaching with the cocktail shaker and Anderson, his leather-faced, thin-lipped assistant manager.

"Hi!" said Bill Monday. "Andy's going to drink this one with us. To the next twenty years, Andy."

"Prosit," said Anderson.

"Dinner's ready," said Jane. "You sit next to Andy, professor."

The professor didn't relish sitting next to Anderson, exactly, because Anderson was a sourpuss who drank Monday's best claret with the air of doing someone a favor. But even Anderson seemed a trivial annoyance in the midst of so much claret and warmth and friendliness and the aroma of good food. For the first time in many years the crackling of a fire on the hearth seemed a distinctly American sound to Burr, a sound that challenged the Korean winter outside the frosted windows. It was, as Bill Monday said, practically a second Christmas.

There were twenty at dinner, half of them young bachelors from below ground. The young men were all at Jane Monday's end of the table, and Jane was plying them with stuffed pheasant and repartee. Jane was forty, but she was neither fat nor fatuous, and she was certainly not being a mother to the boys, no matter how plain she might be. Burr sensed a curious relationship here, eminently wholesome yet with a strange undercurrent of excitement. Jane was feminine without being blatantly female, solicitous without being matronly, amusing and younger than her years without

being kittenish. She was a sort of symbol to young men deprived of normal associations with women of their kind . . .

"Looking at you, Professor," said Bill Monday, leaning across the table to clink glasses. "Have some more pheasant? I'll go out and shoot another one if you do. No trouble."

"Bill, you'd better shoot out to the kitchen instead and see what that Oriental is doing with the pudding. I've rung for him three times. He ignores me."

"He won't ignore me," said Bill, getting up.

It was fully five minutes before he finally came back from the kitchen. He wore an expression of utter dismay, the face of a man who, on seeing his house burn down, remembers he has forgotten his last insurance premium.

"We're betrayed," he said. "England has let us down."

"Where's the pudding?" Jane demanded.

"That's it, the pudding," Bill said. "It's fireproof. I poured a whole bottle of brandy on it, but it won't light."

"*Where* did you pour the brandy?" Jane asked.

"On the pudding," said Bill. "But it won't light. I bought it for Five Star French Brandy and I'll bet it was made in Osaka. The Japs make beautiful imitation cognac labels, but their brandy won't burn. I put sixteen matches to it."

"Did you strike the matches?" inquired Dan Philips.

"Look at it!" said Bill, ignoring the interruption. "A magnificent pudding and a magnificent failure. What good's a Christmas pudding that's not lit?"

The air was suddenly redolent with brandy fumes as the Korean servant brought in the pudding. Yong, the bar boy from the club, smiled at the professor. He was a flat-faced youth with high cheek bones and a smile like a slice of orange. He had the long straight bamboo stem of his pipe pushed into the back of his white gown, with the tiny metal tobacco bowl protruding from the neck, just under one ear. As Yong passed down the table, Anderson reached behind the professor and superciliously snapped his cigarette lighter at the pudding. The platter was immediately enveloped in a flicker of seething blue fire.

To Bill Monday across the table the pudding appeared to have burst into flaming glory just as it emerged from behind the back of Professor Henry Burr. Bill jumped to his feet in big-eyed enthusiasm.

"Marvellous, professor!" he exclaimed. "How did you do it? It's even better than the one with the ace of spades and the hard-boiled egg."

"You and your hard-boiled eggs," said Jane Monday. "Yong, bring that pudding over here so we can get on with the proof."

During the period of pleasant stupefaction which set in while the guests were seeking postures most favorable to quiet digestion, Bill Monday manoeuvred Henry Burr into a corner by the fireplace.

"Professor," he said, "I've been raising hell and playing the clown pretty much ever since you came to Paozan. You probably don't know just how good I am at running a quartz mine, so I wish you'd sort of ask around, before you give your answer to the favor I'm going to ask you. In those papers you gave me—"

"I know," said Henry Burr. "You want me to hit up my brother Charles about a job in California. Your son is working near Sonora."

"Good Lord, you're a mind reader, too, professor. Except that it's not the kid I'm thinking about. I could always bring him out here to Paozan until he learns how to mill ore out of a stope without killing half a dozen muckers. That's what I'd do, if I had my way. I'm set here for the rest of my life. But Jane, now . . . Well, she has been a grand sport for twenty years, but she's entitled to go home and live among her own kind now. She's buried alive up here."

"I don't know that I'd be much help," said Henry Burr, staring at the fire.

"I wouldn't want much of a job," Bill Monday said. "I've got a little high-grade salted away. But I've been gone for so long that I'd be sort of scared to go back and start from scratch, if I didn't have something half-way definite."

"I know exactly how you feel," Burr said.

"So if you'd just write to your brother about me—Hello, Dan. Come over and toast your shins."

The magician turned from the fire to see Dan Philips staring at him with a hard, steely glint in his blue eyes. The old man was not smiling.

"I was just thinking," Dan said, "that the professor's spent three whole days in the best damned mining camp in all Korea and he hasn't even been underground yet. I think I'll take him down tomorrow."

"*You'll* take him down?" Bill Monday's mouth opened in amused surprise.

"Yes, me," said the old storekeeper, still looking at Henry Burr.

A light snow fell during the night, and the thin white crust crunched underfoot as Dan and the professor walked up the hill to the gallows-frame. They stopped to don dungarees and caps with carbide lamps attached and Henry Burr knew that the tightness about his lips was not due entirely to the cold. He definitely did not want to go into the mine with Dan, yet he was strangely helpless before the other's silent determination.

They crowded into the rusty cage with a dozen Koreans. Daylight faded quickly overhead as the cage rattled downward. The drop

seemed bottomless. Water splashed on the roof and spray blew into Burr's face. There was a jerk, the cage bounced up and down a few times until the elasticity in the steel cable had found its point of balance.

"Ninth level," Dan said. His voice sounded thick and far away. "Fifteen hundred feet. We change here." He nudged Burr out of the cage.

"It's dark," the magician said.

"That's the Koreans at the pump stations," Dan explained. "When a light goes bad, they steal them out of the drifts. Look out."

They backed up against the rock wall to make way for an ore car, pushed by a Korean. They bumped their heads on a low timber, rounded a bend in the tunnel, sloshed through water toward a light gleaming murkily in the damp haze. A pneumatic drill was hammering somewhere. A young American who was bossing a gang of Koreans came over to peer at the faces under the carbide lamps.

"Dan!" he exclaimed. "What the hell you doing down here?"

"Showing the professor the mine. You know the professor, Joe? He'll probably make the main shaft disappear. Which way is the winze, Joe?"

"Right over here. Where you going?"

"Clear to the bottom," said Dan in a tight voice. "Thirteenth level."

"You'll have to ride the ore skip," Joe said.

"Fine." Dan's face, usually pink, looked gray in the light of the professor's lamp.

The winze, an inclined shaft that ran at an angle of forty-five degrees, dropped another thousand feet from the end of the tunnel. Joe showed the store-keeper and the magician how to sit on the rear rim of the huge wedge-shaped bucket that was the ore skip, how to put their feet on the opposite rim and grasp the big eyelet that held the steel cable. A Korean engineer closed a water switch and the cable began to unwind from the great drum. The rollers at the bottom of the skip banged and clattered against the guide rails the bucket slipped down, breathlessly down.

"We've got six hundred men working in this mine," Dan shouted above the din. "Six hundred Koreans."

Henry Burr did not reply. He didn't care how many men were in the mine. His hands that gripped the cable anchor were cold and clammy, and there was a sick emptiness at the pit of his stomach. They were still going down, past wooden air-doors where drifts ran off at each level, past long strips of white fungus that reached down from the timbers like dangling ghostly arms. The lamps flickered in the current of warm air rising from below, making the spectral fungus arms writhe and twist. The skip slowed and stopped.

Dan scrambled down. Burr did not move.

"Come on, professor," Dan said. "We're going to talk."

"Talk? You brought me way down here just to talk?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't you have found a quiet place somewhere nearer the surface of the earth?"

"No."

Dan Philips was again staring at him with that strange, hard look. Burr got down from the ore skip, but he was determined to keep it in sight.

It was hot and humid half-a-mile underground, and he could feel his clothing sticking to him. Dan Philips came very close, with perspiration standing in huge drops on his pale forehead. He said:

"Professor, if I didn't know Anderson was paying you only fifty yen and expenses, I'd strangle you with my bare hands—right now!"

"Don't be foolish," the professor stammered.

"Because," Dan went on, "you're doing a million yen worth of damage by playing Andy's game. Andy didn't bring you up here because you're a good magician. He brought you because he found out somewhere that your brother bought a mine near Sonora. Andy wants to get rid of Bill Monday, and it looks like he's going to succeed—thanks to you."

"You're wrong there," Burr protested. "Bill Monday's been thinking about going home for a long time, on account of his wife. She wants to get back to her own kind. She—"

"Don't make me laugh," Dan interrupted. "Jane Monday would be miserable any place except Paozan, and she knows it. Why, Jane is queen here. To the young sprouts she's the very incarnation of all that's fine and beautiful and mysterious in woman. To the married folks she's a social arbiter. To the older men she's the power behind the throne. But back home she'd be just another homely woman growing into middle age, with funny provincial ways nobody would understand. How long do you think Jane could stand being laughed at?"

"But Bill said—"

"Bill would be just as unhappy. After twenty years, he'd be a foreigner in his own country. Why should he go home, when in Paozan he's a prince in his own right? His subjects love him. He runs the only electric plant within a hundred miles. He makes autos drive to the right—the only place in the Japanese Empire where they do. He—"

"Bill and Jane Monday both say they want to go home," Burr insisted. He noticed that Dan was trembling from head to foot. He took a step backwward.

"We all say that," Dan said. "We're all sentimental and homesick at least once a week. We love it. It's a harmless form of self-indulgence. But we know that none

of us, except the young sprouts, will ever go home to live again. We know it—until somebody like you comes around, holding out false hopes."

"But I . . . I . . ."

"Look, Professor. I give you credit for being a good guy. You probably don't realize you're working for the Japanese Government, because you don't know that Andy always goes to Japan for his vacations. But Andy knows that Tokyo would do anything short of war or murder to get rid of Bill Monday, and I'm not so sure about murder. You see, Bill's contract is tied up so tight with the original Paozan concession that he's here for life if he wants—no matter who bought the mines—and he has full say on hiring and firing. The Japs are spoiling to take over up here. They want to staff the mine with Japs from top to bottom. As long as Bill is here, they can't. When Bill goes, the rest of us will be out within a week. Andy will probably get pensioned and the rest of us shipped off with severance pay."

Dan started trembling again. He moved closer to the professor, so close that the wild, fanatical light in his eyes seemed about to burst into flame. The professor stepped back in panic. Dan grabbed both his arms in a tight, biting grip. The professor felt something die inside of him.

"Why do you think I brought you down here?" Dan's voice rasped.

"I know why." The professor gulped. "So go ahead and get it over with."

"Get what over with?"

"The fatal accident. You don't want me to help the Mondays go home, so you brought me down here to have a fatal accident."

"Fatal accident, hell!" Dan croaked. "Professor, you're looking at the worst case of claustrophobia this side of Bellevue. In all the nineteen years I've been at Paozan, I've never been in the mine before. I know every stope and tunnel on paper, but I've never come underground before today. And I'm scared, professor. I'm so scared right now that I'm sick. They'll all tell you it's true.

"Professor, I know you're a good guy and you think you'd be doing Bill and Jane a good turn by sending 'em in to your brother. I know that if I'd just tried to talk you out of it yesterday, you'd thought I was a heel. But coming down here with you, doing something that takes more guts than I thought I had, I hoped maybe I could convince you how much this thing means to me and the rest of us who stand to lose our homes. I thought maybe I could talk you into letting Bill think you were a phoney—that this fellow Burr in Sonora really isn't your brother but somebody with the same name; that he's an awful pain in the neck and wouldn't look at anybody who knows you; that maybe he hates you because you ran off with his wife. Anything—"

The professor went limp. His knees buckled for a moment, then recovered. He threw back his head and laughed—so loudly that a Korean miner, stripped to the waist, stopped pushing an ore car, to turn around and stare.

"For the love of Houdini!" the professor gasped. "If there isn't going to be an accident, let's get the hell out of here—right now."

The two men collided as they leaped for the bell signal.

After the humid heat of the thirteenth level, the cold on the surface seemed particularly sharp and biting. Henry Burr's teeth were chattering as he stripped off his dungarees, but he felt warm inside—warm and contented with himself. He was probably like the men and women of Paozan; he really didn't want to go home. Of course he was certain that he was just as good as Russell Swan or that Port Said chicken-snatcher—What was his name?—Galli Galli? There was nothing they did that he couldn't do. . .

"We'll stop at the club for a drink," Dan said.

The rickety stage from Kyong was standing in front of the Paozan Mines Club as they walked up. As they climbed the steps, a peal of vaguely familiar laughter sent a chill of premonition tingling down the professor's back. As he entered the big lounge, the sight of a fur-lined coat flung over a chair caused the chill to permeate his vitals. Yong, the bar boy, grinned at him as he passed with a tray of glasses, but the professor did not smile back; he was staring in consternation at Mr. Dexter Pinnock, sitting over a Scotch and Tansan with Bill Monday.

Both Mr. Pinnock and Bill Monday seemed in high spirits, but when Mr. Pinnock saw the professor, his beaming countenance became immediately mournful. He got up and by way of greeting patted the professor sadly on the shoulder.

"I've got bad news for you, old man," said Mr. Pinnock. "Your brother Charles is dead."

The professor muttered something unintelligible. He looked at Dan Philips.

"No, not in Dorset, old man," Mr. Pinnock said. "In Sacramento. He was hurt in an auto accident and he died in hospital there. But he's left you his entire share of the Oriflamme mine, professor."

Burr was dazed. His lips moved but he did not speak. Dan Philips watched him expectantly.

"Your brother's lawyer cabled the American Consul in Seoul yesterday, trying to get in touch with you," Mr. Pinnock went on. "I thought it would be the decent thing to come up and break the news to you myself."

"Look, professor," said Bill Monday, coming over to shake Burr's hand before he could say a word. "I'm sorry as hell about your

brother, and I know it's pretty crude to look on your hard luck as a break for me, but now that you're the boss of Oriflamme—"

"You . . . I—I . . . Don't believe all this stuff," the professor stammered.

"Oh, it's true all right, unfortunately," said Mr. Pinnock, taking a folded pink paper from his pocket. "Here's the cable. I picked it up at the Consulate, because I knew you'd want confirmation . . . Say, Mr. Monday, would you mind leaving the professor with me for a few moments, until we get a few details settled?"

"Why, certainly," said Bill. "See you later."

"Look here," Dan began belligerently, but Bill Monday led him away by the arm.

When they were alone, Mr. Pinnock sat down again. Burr remained standing.

"So you were going to crawfish on me, were you?" Mr. Pinnock said. "The minute I laid eyes on you I knew you'd gone soft. What happened? Who got to you?"

"Nobody. I just found out what the whole business was about and decided I didn't like it. I'll give you your check back."

"Too late," said Mr. Pinnock. "You can't back out now."

"Oh yes, I can," Burr said.

"Oh no, you can't," Mr. Pinnock insisted, "unless you want to get mixed up with a Japanese Army firing squad. I happen to know who sneaked a wallet out of General Komatsu's pocket in a Hankow bar last month."

Henry Burr's face turned the color of wet chalk. He sat down limply. "That money didn't belong to General Komatsu," he said. "The general stole it from the American Mission School at Wuntao when his troops moved in from the North."

"A general never steals; he commandeers or requisitions," said Mr. Pinnock. "You, on the other hand, stole the money. That's a court martial offense."

"I didn't take that money for myself," Burr protested. "I was doing a favor for Dr. Smith at the mission. There were taking care of a lot of kids up there, and I offered to get the money."

"You did a very neat job of it," Mr. Pinnock said. "It's partly out of admiration for your skill that I've kept quiet so long. But unfortunately the Eurasian accordion player at the end of the bar saw you, too, and I was able to buy his affidavit for forty dollars Mex. Are you really going to back out, professor?"

"I . . ." Burr hesitated.

"I think you'd better tell Mr. Monday that he can have a job at Oriflamme, and that he can go over on the same boat with you. It won't be difficult for you to disappear in San Francisco."

"Mr. Pinnock, you're a—a—"

"Louse," prompted Mr. Pinnock. "You have just half an hour to

make up your mind. In the meantime you might call the bar boy.

"Call him yourself," the professor growled. "His name is Yong."

"Yong!" bellowed Mr. Pinnock. "Whiskey-Tansan, Yong!"

Yong was apparently occupied elsewhere. Mr. Pinnock was still yelling for him as the professor went down the steps of the club, three at a time."

The professor had no idea where he was going in such a hurry, but speed seemed to ease his feelings. He walked rapidly to the limit of the little colony, skirted the electric plant, came back, still walking as though he were en route to catch a train.

Approaching the club house again, he saw Dan Philips. Dan seemed to be coming from the service entrance.

"Well," said Dan, "I guess everything smells different now."

"Why should it?" Burr countered.

"That skunk in there is Dexter Pinnock. Whenever Pinnock shows up somewhere, the damnedest strangest odors break loose over a surrounding region of 500 square miles. How the hell did he ever get his dirty paws on your brother's mine, professor?"

"I have no brother and never did have," said Burr solemnly. "And there is no mine."

"Good boy!" Dan pounded the professor enthusiastically on the back. "I knew you'd say that—so I had the stage driver pull up behind Monday's bungalow to wait for you. You'll have to start."

"Start? Where—?"

"It's best you go without seeing Bill Monday. He won't believe this phoney story about your not having a brother, any more than I would. Just let him think you ran out on him, and he'll be so sore he'll forget all about Sonora and wanting to leave Paozan."

"I'm afraid I won't be able to get very far before Mr. Pinnock catches up with me. Mr. Pinnock isn't going to like my going so suddenly . . ."

"Will forty-eight hours start be enough for you, professor?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Good. The stage driver is ready. You'll just have time to make tonight's Mukden Express. Here's your fifty yen—and a little extra stake for expenses. I'll get it back from the boys."

"Are—are you sure you'll be able to keep Mr. Pinnock from wiring ahead to have me picked up on some pretense or other?"

"When Pinnock wakes up," Dan said, "he'll find himself half a mile underground."

"But he's wide awake now."

"He's having another drink, isn't he? Then I'm not so sure he'll be still awake. Yong the bar boy, admires you, he likes me, and he worships Bill Monday. Yong knows exactly what to do. I told him. And something is going to happen to the ore skip, after Pinnock gets down

to the thirteenth level, no one knows how. We'll just be able to lower food and drink and a few blankets through a ventilation shaft for a couple of days . . .

"Your bags are in the stage, professor. They're not well packed, I'm afraid, but there wasn't much time. Goodbye and the best of luck."

On the frozen cinders of the station platform at Kyong, Professor Henry Burr stamped his feet to keep warm. It was nearly dark. He would be in Mukden next morning, but there was no use stopping there. Tientsin used to be a good show town, but it might not be safe to stop there, either. Peking was only four hours further; and he had always been able to pick up a booking or at least a railway ticket in the Wagon-Lits Bar. Besides, the U.S. Marines were still in Peking . . .

The professor thrust his hands into his pockets. One hand touched paper. He drew out the check on the Bank of Chosen, back-palmed it, brought it back, made it vanish again. A magician has to be pretty good, he told himself, to do the back-palm with gloves on.

He tore up the check, watched the pieces flutter into the night.

"The crook would probably have stopped payment on it anyway," he said aloud.

The shrill whistle of the Mukden Express sounded far down the track.

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## NEXT MONTH

STORIES by

WENZELL BROWN—THE MAN WITH TWO SHADOWS

AUGUST DERLETH—ADVENTURE OF THE CLOVERDALE KENNELS

GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT—POINT OF HONOR

AVRAM DAVIDSON—MAN WHO FOUND THE BODY

*and*

THE SAINT

and

THE DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

by *LESLIE CHARTERIS*

—in your **THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

# AN EDITORIAL ASIDE

The present issue once more reflects the difficulty—or should I say the inadvisability—of taking any one story and suggesting that it is typical of what is so loosely described as "the mystery story". Russell Janney, in his deliberate evocation of the glitter and of the tempo of yesterday, and, by way of contrast, Lawrence G. Blochman in his story based (it so happens) on a personal experience in Korea, —each reflect the many-sided facets of the field.

Russell Janney is of course the author of the almost legendary, THE MIRACLE OF THE BELLS, THE VAGABOND KING, etc., etc., while Mr. Blochman—but let me quote Leslie Charteris in his introduction to RED SNOW AT DARJEELING, which has just appeared in *The Saint Mystery Library*,—

"Mr. Blochman does not rely for his information on guidebooks, but has personally worked and travelled in the countries he writes about, whether they be in South America, the lesser-known corners of Europe, or—as in this case—the Orient."

Appleby of Scotland Yard, art connoisseur and detective, returns in the present group of four pastiches by Michael Innes reflecting much of the urbane competence characteristic of Innes' more than twenty novels and collections of short stories, published in this country by Dodd, Mead & Co.

Ruth Wilson wrote some years ago how the broad red-brick road where she had her "peace-seeking roots" was decked with sycamore and maples, althea and japonica, and how it'd been staked out by the F.B.I., scouted by the police, and inhabited by actors, painters, musicians, two would-be suicides, and an unsuccessful murderer.

The late Louis Golding, the distinguished British novelist, and one of the great names in English letters in these last decades, who sent me the typescript of this story some time before his death, was the author of more than 50 books. He is perhaps best known here as the author of MR. EMMANUEL and of the best-selling MAGNOLIA STREET.

A final word. Our *Saint's Ratings* is revived (permanently, I hope) with this issue, and so is my own column of comment on books which may interest some of you, and which I have not had time to write in recent months. This is why some of you have also had to wait a long time (much too long, I am the first to admit) for action on unsolicited submissions to this magazine. Mrs. Roxana Keenan has now joined us, as my assistant, so some of you will be hearing from her shortly on your submissions to this and our companion magazines.

HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

# TWO MEN IN A TRAIN

**by LOUIS GOLDING**

We both got into the train at Oxford, the man with the green tie and I. The compartment was empty. He sat down with his back to the engine; I sat facing the engine. There was nothing extraordinary about him, a gold tooth, or flat nostril, or anything; but I have to talk about him, so I'll call him the man with the green tie, which is the only thing I noticed about him at the time.

We didn't say a word to each other all the way to Reading. He was just as little interested in me as I in him. Then the train stopped, and hearing a boy shouting out: "Pa—purr! Pa—purr!" we both stepped out on to the platform and bought one. A moment later we got back into the compartment again, settled down in our respective corners, and got our noses into our newspapers.

Two minutes passed, three minutes. Then a news-story on an inner page attracted my attention. The headline ran:

**NIGHTMARE MAY HAVE SCARED WOMAN TO DEATH**

and the story went as follows:

*The possibility that death resulted from a nightmare was suggested at the inquest at Sevening to-day on Mrs. Helen Westover, age 36, of Grinton Street, Sevening.*

*Her husband, Mr. James Westover, insurance agent, said he was awakened during the night by his wife falling across him. She struggled as if in a fit and then stopped breathing.*

*Dr. W. Nettel, pathologist, said a post-mortem examination had failed to show the cause of death. Mrs. Sevening had an enlarged thymus gland and it was possible that her death may have followed a terrifying dream.*

I read the story through, then I read it again. It seemed curiously familiar. I had come across that thymus gland before. Somebody had told me about it. Or I had read it. But who? Where?

And then, quite unaccountably, I had a feeling that the man in the green tie sitting just opposite me was also interested in this account of the thymus gland death. He, too, I was convinced, had been reading the news-story and at this very moment was reflecting on it, just as I was. I let the newspaper fall four or five inches, and the man with the green tie, perhaps hearing the paper rustle, let his paper fall, too. I found his eyes looking into mine.

"Funny business, isn't it?"

"Yes," I agreed. "very strange." I have no idea at all why I just took it for granted we meant the same thing. There were, after all, thirty other news-stories in the evening-paper.

"I've heard about it somewhere before," I went on. "Something just like it."

"So have I," he said. "I was just thinking about it. Wasn't there a case exactly like this one reported in the newspaper some months ago, six, maybe seven?"

"Yes, that's it!" I cried. For the thing came back to me in a sudden rush of memory. Yes, of course, I *had* read in the newspaper of an identical case some half-year ago. I remembered not only reading it, but mentioning it to my doctor, who is by way of being a good friend, too, and drops in to lunch from time to time. The little snatch of talk came back to me quite vividly.

"Have you read this business of the woman dying in a nightmare, doc?" I had asked him.

"I see too many people dying," he said. "You want me to read about them as well?"

"Do you think it's a sensible idea," I ventured, "printing such details?"

"What details?"

"What is the thymus gland, doc?" I asked him. (That is the way we always carry on a conversation—just one question after another). Before the doctor had time to answer me, the telephone bell rang. It was an exciting call, one of those calls which put everything else out of your mind for hours. I had not thought of thymus glands from that moment to this.

"I don't think it's very clever printing details like this," said the man with the green tie. He tapped the newspaper three or four times with his forefinger. I knew exactly what he was talking about. "It's dangerous," he insisted. "Don't you agree?"

"Yes, I do," I declared. "I re-

member thinking the same thing when I read about that other case. Sheffield, was it? Or was it Bradford?"

"Bradford. It's wrong. It might put ideas into people's heads."

"Quite so," I agreed. He seemed an intelligent person. "I remember mentioning it to my doctor. At least, I was going to," I added. He didn't seem particularly interested in that. He was more interested in his own thoughts.

"Anything could happen," said the man with the green tie earnestly.

"What do you mean?" I wasn't with him any more.

He lowered the newspaper on to his knee, then placed the tip of his left forefinger against the tip of his right, making an inverted V.

"Supposing a fellow found out his wife was suffering from an enlarged thymus gland," he speculated. "Just supposing."

"How would he find that out?"

He looked at me as if he felt he had probably exaggerated my intelligence.

"He may have insured his wife's life for instance," he pointed out, "and he may have seen the doctor's report. That's one way."

"Yes, of course," I admitted, feeling a little foolish. There was quite a sensible pause. "Yes," I asked, for evidently he had more to say.

He was away off somewhere. I noticed there were little yellow finger-nail parings in the green weave of the tie. Then he came back into the railway-carriage.

"Supposing he didn't like his wife," he said. "Supposing he wanted to kill her."

"Exactly," I said. "That's exactly what flashed through *my* mind."

"All he's got to do is to fake up a nightmare for her." He seemed very upset about the whole thing. "It's not fair to the public, making it easy, like that." He was talking of the newspaper account again.

"A fake nightmare," I reflected. "I see. I think I know just what you mean."

"There are lots of ways of doing it," he said.

"You'd make certain she had something that disagreed with her for supper," I ventured helpfully. "A lobster, say."

"With cucumber."

"Then there are sorts of gadgets that make ghostly noises," I supplied. My imagination was getting to work. "You can get them in those shops where they sell imitation ink-stains and rubber spiders. *You* know?"

"I know," he said quietly. "You'd have one of those gadgets in your coat-pocket on the chair beside the bed. Every now and again you'd put your hand out and turn the thing slowly upside down, and it would wail like a lost soul."

"Ghastly," I murmured.

"And supposing there was a lamp outside and a creeper growing round the window," continued the man with the green tie. "You could

tie a piece of string round a branch of the creeper, and the other end round your wrist. Then you'd twist your hand from time to time, and each time the moving shadow on the wall of the room would look just like a ghost."

"Of course, you'd get rid of the string, and nobody would be any wiser," I suggested. "And those gadgets, too, that make the noises, you could easily dispose of them, too."

"I don't suppose that would matter. Most houses with small boys have things like that about the place. My own small boy has several."

"Quite so."

"So there she is, not quite asleep, but she isn't awake yet. And every now and again there's that wailing noise. And the ghost is moving to and fro all the time. Suddenly there's a tremendous crash, as if the whole house is falling down. You know those contraptions, don't you, they only cost a few pence? You drop one of those beside the bed."

"Yes, I know them."

"That's the last straw. The enlarged thymus gland can't stand any more. There's an immense overstimulation of the heart. Too much adrenalin. The poor woman has a fit. She can't shout. She can't breathe. She's done for."

I shuddered.

"It's frightful," I said. "So horribly cold-blooded."

"Frightful!" he echoed. "And all because of this!" He indicated the newspaper. "Putting ideas into some wicked man's head! Ah well!" He picked up the newspaper again, turned it round, and began to study another column—it was the stocks and shares, as far as I could see. He'd had enough of the thymus gland. He'd got the thing off his chest.

Well, that was that. He didn't want to talk any more. I picked up my newspaper, too, but I couldn't get interested. I sat looking out of the window, at the fields, the sidings, the old hangars, the mounds of mouldering tyres. It was getting dark fast. We were now approaching the outskirts of London. Yes, here was Ealing Broadway.

"Excuse me," said the man with the green tie. He had his bag in the rack above my head. I moved, and he got it down. I opened the door for him. He had the bag in one hand, the newspaper in the other.

"Good-night," I said.

He got out of the carriage on the platform. A slung lamp encased him in a cone of light.

"Good-night, he said, and turned to go off. Then he turned again and waved the newspaper at me.

"It's not fair," he said. "It makes it too easy. Don't you think?" Then he winked. It was like the shutter coming down on a snake's eye. An ice-cold sweat came out on my forehead. "Good-night," the murderer said again, and went off, and disappeared among the suburban passengers.

# DUTY

**by RUTH WILSON**

What was it about Mr. Billow? Aunt Ida, like the other guests of the best boarding-house at Wildwood, New Jersey, thought him too, too wonderful. An eligible man of suitable age; and so dashing and mannerly with his striped flannels and his elegant mustache!

Amy, although already seventeen, and so tall and pretty, felt otherwise. Mamma and Papa had never met him; they were at home awaiting the arrival of a little bundle from Heaven, due now almost at any moment. Aunt Ida was looking after Amy for the summer.

They had been there a month, and Amy was sure that Aunt Ida was still confused, especially about the beau she had left at home, the friend the family called Cousin George.

Before Aunt Ida left, Mamma and Papa had told her to clinch matters; Cousin George had been courting a long time, and Aunt Ida was not getting younger. But Aunt Ida vowed and declared that she would not, no, positively would not, in this up-to-the-minute year of 1900, marry the last man on earth, no matter how well-off, good-looking, and educated, if he insisted on holding a job as a *policeman!* George and his "duty!"

Now here was Mr. Billow! Aunt

Ida, the day after they unpacked, had been paddling in the ripples on the wide, clean, lonely beach. Amy looked up at her shell-gathering at a shadow beside her. It is so easy to get acquainted on the beach! Mr. Billow said, "There are some prettier ones farther along."

"Thank you." Amy tried to be adult. "I prefer these here, near my auntie." Aunt Ida was almost the only other person in sight; the coarse beach grass sloped down to untouched sands.

"Oh, that's your auntie?" Mr. Billow looked at them both. "But you and she are so alike—those long ash-blonde braids and those beautiful complexions—"

Aunt Amy was near enough to hear. She pretended to adjust the sailor-collar of her bright blue mohair bathing-suit. Then she came toward them, the water squelching from her canvas bathing shoes. The wind blew in from the sea over the long empty reaches.

"I hope I'm not being forward. I'm Septimus Billow. I believe I saw you at breakfast at Crestview."

"Perhaps we saw you too," Aunt Ida blushed. "I'm Ida Spires. Miss Spires. This is my niece, Amy Spires."

"Delighted." Amy found his handshake unpleasant, although it was polite and firm.

His constant attentions from then on had Amy puzzled. All of this was so sudden. If Aunt Ida had had money of her own, Amy could have understood it better. But Papa always provided everything.

And Aunt Ida was being a fusser since meeting Mr. Billow and some of his ideas. Naps, for example.

It was his suggestion that Amy take two hours of enforced rest after lunch, while Aunt Ida went off alone with him, exploring Wildwood.

Yet he could be agreeable. He was a magnificent swimmer, and to see him wade out, fall forward, and then sweep out to sea in a breast stroke powerful and tireless, made Amy tight with envy. Then, without being asked, he reasoned Aunt Ida into letting him teach Amy to swim. The water was so clean; even the stranded jellyfish had an untouched look.

In a shorter time than anyone could have imagined, Amy found herself wonderfully at home in the water. Aunt Ida, who could not swim and did not want to look awkward, stayed on at the shallow edge.

"Like this, Amy," Mr. Billow would say, putting a hand here, a hand there.

Amy shivered inwardly whenever he touched her. But she kept on; as,

in deeper and deeper water, the swimming grew better every day.

She kept telling herself that the way she felt, deep down inside, this sense of *warning*, was only too much imagination. What if he did tap her braids with a fingertip when she shook them out of her bathing-cap. That was the way Aunt Ida treated the landlady's dog.

If only there were someone she could mention *things* to. For instance, if he wanted to make up his mind about marriage, how long should it take? And in writing a questioning letter, for instance, would she say—— Maybe if Cousin George could get a *look* at Mr. Billow—easier said than done, as they say. Now if he were to see a photo—the way a man named Lomboso or Lombroso could tell all about people from the shape of the ears and eyebrows and so on—— She found herself writing a letter telling Cousin George she wished she could see *him*, and slipping it secretly into the mail-box.

As they walked together near the beach-front the next day, Amy spied, in what had been a vacant store, the life-sized cardboard cut-outs of a travelling photographer. The cut-outs were so funny—big headless easels with half-moon chin-rests, painted in front with a baby riding Maud the Mule, or a fat man in a long-sleeved striped bathing-suit. You stood behind them for the picture.

Amy went up to the window. "I'd love to have my picture taken. Can't we, Aunt Ida?"

Aunt Ida liked it a lot. So Mr. Billow had to come along. The photographer promised the finished picture-cards the next day.

It was a surprise, though, when on every one of them, even the one of Aunt Ida and Mr. Billow making-believe to be on a rock at Niagara Falls, his face was just a blur.

Was there a reason? In a book she found in the landlady's bookcase, a man named Holmes got into the room of somebody *he* wanted to know about; it had seemed all right for Mr. Holmes.

Of course Mr. Billow hadn't *done* anything. Or he would be running away, instead of eating three juicy meals a day at their table and showing Aunt Ida how to play the mandolin.

His room was handy; down the hall from theirs around the bend next to the bathroom. All the room keys fitted all the locks; big things that opened the doors without half trying. And nobody was around there for two hours every day.

*Thou Shalt Not Steal*, it said in the Commandments. Nothing about just *looking*.

The next afternoon was cloudy and cool. Sometimes on cloudy days Aunt Ida and Mr. Billow came back earlier. But she pretended to be going down the hall to the bathroom, hiding the big room-key in her dress ruffle.

Then she felt scared and stupid. In Mr. Billow's room the bureau drawers were full of just clothes. The desk was locked. Nothing in the suit pockets or under the pillows. No letters, nobody's picture. The bottle of hair-oil tipped over annoyingly as she closed the bottom drawer. She soaked up the few drops with the stuffed-tomato pincushion and it hardly showed.

Later she thought maybe Mr. Billow used something to keep mosquitoes away; she hadn't remembered that persistent smell of vanilla clinging to her hands before, even after she washed them.

At supper she thought he might be watching her. But she was sure he would never guess that inside she was a trifle fidgety. She kept wondering if he noticed that odor of vanilla; his hair seemed to smell of it too.

Next morning, at their usual lonely spot, it looked ideal for swimming. Not a cloud in the sky, not a frown anywhere. The water sparkled and danced, the air was exciting. Mr. Billow seemed very gay. Wildwood, he said, was a wonderful place.

"I feel just fine today," she told Aunt Ida as they reached the beach. The day was too bright to bother about anything.

Mr. Billow smiled sympathetically. "She is such a delightful creature. Makes me feel sorry for myself for being such an old bach and having no family of my own."

Aunt Ida blushed. "No one's fault but yours, you know," she said daringly.

"Ah, don't tempt me." Mr. Billow raised a romantic eyebrow. "Even in jest. Who knows—things may change——"

Aunt Ida blushed again.

Mr. Billow folded his robe neatly and laid his straw beach hat beside it. "Come, little lady," he said to Amy. "Shall we venture?"

"Not too far." Aunt Ida always said that to them.

"I'll not let her go beyond her powers." Mr. Billow was reassuring.

Aunt Ida looked about at the lonely sands and the lonelier sea. Far off three or four picnic parties scattered about were frolicking.

"I've heard that at some resorts now they have regular paid watchers to swim out in case people get into trouble in the water. Life guards, I think they're called."

"If you don't trust me——" he began reproachfully.

"Oh, no, never that!" Aunt Ida was all a-flutter. "With you——" they exchanged some grown-up murmurs.

As she waded out Amy hesitated. Was anything different? About Mr. Billow? About the day? Her first strokes made her forget everything. She swam strongly, feeling more alive at every moment. The waves rocked her a little, as she followed Mr. Billow in their usual manner. He seemed to be signalling her on.

Usually they swam in a long oval, so that by the time Amy had had enough she was close to shore again. When now she felt the first signs of tiring, she trod water and looked up. Mr. Billow was not ahead of her! The vast horizon, empty and threatening, was what she faced. The distant land lay far behind! The wind was rising, a white-cap slapped at her. Her heart squeezed together, she felt herself sinking.

Quickly she told herself, *Don't be scared.* Relax. Breathe deeply. Hold the rhythm. Forget the bottomless sea beneath! Again she felt herself sinking. Her feet thrashed wildly, her hands began to slap the water.

Wrong, all wrong! Take your time. Keep the beat. Don't be scared. *Don't be scared!* People can stay on the top of the water for days if they just keep control. Mamma—Papa—you're so far away! Don't feel tired, just feel as if you're floating. There, now, it's all coming back, you're swimming again, be sure now you're going back toward the land. Slowly, slowly. You'll get there. Take your time. Swim, rest. Swim, rest. Where was Mr. Billow? Surely, *surely* nothing had happened to him!

Suddenly she saw him. He was *between* her and the shore. How strange! How could she have gotten away from him like that? Was he motioning to her? She felt a surge of relief; he would help her over the long journey back. As she stroked slowly toward him, looking at him as often as possible to be sure she didn't lose him again, she saw him arch suddenly *beneath* the water.

The waves were rocking her more now. But she tried to keep steady.

All at once something seized her foot. She tried to pull away. As the water surged up around her she could see a dark mass beneath her. Mr. Billow! Oh, wonderful. But—— she was going under! She could not swim, not even float! What was he doing? She tried to scream to him and a cascade of salt water poured into her mouth. He was pulling her deeper and deeper!

The fearful clutch and the sud-

denly swelling wave reaching her tore her between them. She was strangling, her eyes swam redly and there was no more air to breathe anywhere, her ears were exploding and her whole body was her bursting lungs. Mamma—mamma—oh, Lord, who made Peter to walk on the water—help me——.

Suddenly her bathing shoe in Mr. Billow's grip pulled away under the tremendous pressure of the enormous wave that had swept upon them with no warning, like a tidal rip; she was torn loose and tumbled over and over like a rag, and carried in one endless rushing sweep of foam and water and crashing spray the whole incredible distance over the surface of the sea until she was flung on the receding shallows, to be picked up by the screaming picnickers, who had seen the giant wave rise on the horizon but were helpless. Mr. Billow was tossed on the sands nearby.

How painful to be squeezed and slapped back to life again! There was Aunt Ida weeping and wailing; there was Mr. Billow coughing out the salt water and telling how he had tried to save her but she had persisted in swimming away from him; finally they got somebody's pony-cart to carry her to bed and hot tea and strange dreams.

Always the same dream; had Mr. Billow tried to kill her? He must have guessed that she had been in his room. But she did not care anything any more about his room, or him either. He would never get her in the water again. That lucky wave saved her. Except that it was more than a wave.

The local Wildwood paper, hurriedly looking it up, had a piece on it:

*"Local Resort Has Small Tsunami Underwater Quake Wave Hits Beach Here."*

Then a long account of how, far off under the surface, some minor earthquake which had not even been felt on shore had set off the wave which had rushed over the gently-sloping off-shore bottom faster than an express train, sweeping them miraculously up on the sand instead of carrying them out to sea, and not even doing any damage because it had not come up farther than high tide.

What a terrible experience!

But after a few days, when she was a little recovered, she sensed a difference in Mr. Billow.

The curious tension she always had in his presence, the sense of being constantly watched, was gone. It was as if Mr. Billow, having tried something which didn't quite come off, even through no fault of his own, was no longer interested.

But Aunt Ida too seemed to feel something: Mr. Billow must be cooling off! In her way, she too had tried something that hadn't come off. And it was driving her to panic.

Mr. Billow still sat at their table, took them to the beach, strolled along with them on walks; but as if he were meeting them for the first time.

At night in bed, Aunt Ida wept deep into her pillow with endless anxious tears.

"How soon do you think it would be all right to ask Mr. Billow to visit us at home?" she finally burst out to Amy.

Amy could only stare.

It was plain that whether Aunt Amy wanted to marry Mr. Billow or not, she *must* bring him to the point of a proposal! Her pride must be saved at any cost.

She no longer gave a thought to anything else: she primped and curled and laced, and even powdered, as never before.

Mr. Billow seemed to be making up his mind to a course of action.

About two weeks after the *tsunami*, he announced a decision. They were at the noon-day dinner.

"I'm leaving tomorrow," said Mr. Billow.

"Oh, no." Aunt Ida gave an involuntary gasp.

Mr. Billow smiled with impersonal politeness. "Yes, I've really overstayed my earlier expectations. I must be moving along, delightful as the time has been."

"But—but—" Aunt Ida held her fork like a last hope.

Mr. Billow continued to eat roast lamb. "It *has* been delightful, knowing you and your dear niece—" a bow to the niece—"but you can understand that even the pleasantest vacations——"

Aunt Ida could not speak. With pained eyes Amy saw her try desperately for anything that would re-establish her as a courted and flattered damsel with coyness wholly justified.

Finally Aunt Ida took a sip of water and said, "I'd been expecting a—a letter from my brother. Of course you know I make my home with him and my sister-in-law—it was my—his—intention to invite you to—to call if you care to—visit—us——"

"Very kind," said Mr. Billow. "I may occasionally be in your city—but I could hardly take advantage of your kindness."

Aunt Ida wet her lips. "He—he would be most happy to meet you—many things in common—so many pleasant times this summer——."

Mr. Billow ate more roast lamb.

Aunt Ida put up her napkins to hide the sudden trembling of her

lips. Surely, thought Amy, Mr. Billow wasn't worth all *that* fuss!

They had been too intent to take notice of a commotion in the hall. But it seemed there was a telegram for Aunt Ida. Imagine, a telegram! People never got telegrams except on matters of life and death. She rushed out into the hall to tip the boy and sign for it.

When she came back, her agitation had a justifiable channel.

"It's from my bother. I must go home at once—his wife needs me." Her flurried glance fell on Amy. "Oh, dear, what am I to do with *you? That's* no place for you now—you'll just have to stay here a day or two by yourself." She sighed with anxiety. "Oh, it's so *difficult*—but you're a big girl now, Amy—the livery stable man will drive you to the train and your papa will meet you when you arrive—I'm sure he wouldn't want you to come today—."

Mr. Billow had risen courteously when she came back to the table. "If I may suggest—would you allow me to bring Miss Amy home to you tomorrow—since I have to pass through the city on the first part of my journey—only one down-train a day from here and it goes nowhere but there—?" he was humorously deprecatory.

"Would you?" Aunt Ida's eyes shone like stars. "Oh, Mr. Billow—you're so *good*—it will be wonderful—Amy, you'll have to do the packing, the livery buggy must take me in a few minutes or I'll miss today's train—be a good child and do what Mr. Billow tells you—you have my address, Mr. Billow—it's so *good* of you—now kiss me goodbye, Amy, and I'll just get on my hat—oh, dear, there's the man—" she was gone.

Amy had not said a word. Suddenly, until tomorrow afternoon, she belonged to Mr. Billow! Mr. Billow—the man who—no, it had been only her imaginings.

The near-catastrophe in the water could have happened with anyone!

At supper he held her chair, helped her to gravy, poured her milk from the pitcher. Afterwards he invited her for a stroll, bought her a glass of birch beer, told her that since her Aunt Ida had forgotten to leave her any money, he would buy her ticket and pay for anything else necessary, and her papa could repay him when they reached home.

She fell asleep feeling rather sorry that the vacation was so abruptly over.

The bright moonlight must have been what wakened her. She lay luxuriating in the comfort of having the big curly white iron bed all

to herself. Then she thought she heard something outside the door. A creak? A footstep?

The useless door-locks flashed into her mind. She did not move. There was *something* out there. A long sigh beyond the door, and someone moved silently away.

If it was odd, everything was odd now. After the *tsunami,* nothing could hurt her! She drifted off to sleep.

The noon dinner was over, her valises were ready on the porch, she was making a last trip to her room back from her brush-up in the bathroom, when she saw that Mr. Billow's door was open. He was not there, he had obviously been called away on a second's notice. His travelling-bags, packed but open, lay on the bed. His desk was open!

If she might risk just a peep! It seemed so long since she had dared that silly expedition to explore his room. She would be able to hear him coming long before he could see her leave.

Just a glance at his desk—and all it had was a paper folder with some newspaper clippings—"*Young Girl Missing;*" "*Young Girl Disappears From Farm;*" "*Girl Vanishes Without Trace.*" But before she could read on she heard Mr. Billow's voice, and was sedately reaching the foot of the stairs as he saw her.

He held a package. "Something for you. Came by express just now. I took it since I had to go down to speak to the livery-stable man. He's waiting with the buggy now."

"Oh, thank you." Amy wondered with surprise if this was Mr. Billow's way of giving her a remembrance.

The package was hard and lumpy, with a thick string. Mr. Billow felt in his upper vest pocket, next to his fountain pen and comb. From a little sheath fixed in the pocket he took out a sharp little knife, with a two-edged blade and a handle that was the open end of a buttonhook.

Amy cut the string. The paper fell away to disclose a large doll. A card read "*Love to Amy.*"

That vague letter to Cousin George, saying she wishes she could see him! And here were the little brown mustache on the serious face, the neat hair, the bright blue uniform with the brass buttons, the night-stick and the polished shield No. 684! A perfect pint-size replica! Cousin George always loved his little joke!

"Cousin George!" Amy couldn't believe it.

Mr. Billow, suddenly very quiet and attentive, looked at the doll. "Cousin George? You have a cousin who is a—a—"

"Aunt Ida's beau." Amy felt

completely bewildered.

"Your aunt didn't mention to me that she has a suitor, especially one who is a—a—"

"Didn't she?" For the first time Amy glanced up at him. Was this mask-like, expressionless face, Mr. Billow?

"No." Then, without a change of tone or face, he said, "The buggy is waiting. We'd better go."

Suddenly Amy felt a surge of fear such as she had never felt before. She wanted to scream, to flee! But who would listen? And what was she afraid of? He had done nothing, said nothing. How would she get home alone? Aunt Ida and her flightiness!

"We'd better go," he repeated.

She was seated in the buggy, all the suitcases were put under the seat, the livery-stable man was given some bills to go about his business and told that a boy would drive the buggy back from the depot. The brown horse tossed his head and tightened against the reins and the high wheels turned.

Mr. Billow had not said a word to her since they left the staircase. Seemingly too he had forgotten to take back his little knife. Amy realized she still had it in her hand with the doll. Somehow she did not feel like speaking. She compromised by hooking it unnoticed to a button of the doll's uniform.

Suddenly Mr. Billow spoke. "What did you say his name was?"

Amy held the doll close. "We call him Cousin George." How dry her throat was.

"He must have a very special interest in your family?"

"Yes," said Amy miserably.

Why was she so uneasy? What had come over Mr. Billow that could upset her so? Could he be jealous of a doll? Of course the doll was dressed as a policeman. But what had that to do—

They were driving through mean and lonely streets; not at all, as Amy remembered, in the direction of the depot.

"*Girl Vanishes Without Trace,*" it had said in the folder.

Her voice caught as she said, "Are we going the right way, Mr. Billow? Are we?" Little cold drops trickled from her heart into her stomach.

"It will take us where we are going," he said somberly. His face remained fixed; it was as lifeless as the doll. Far away, Amy caught sight of a long waving tassel of black smoke in the sky.

"Isn't that the train? 'Way over there?" She tried to hold down her panic, clutching the doll. "We'll miss it, Mr. Billow." What did he want of her? "I've got to get home.

you know. They—they'll be looking for me."

"We'll meet the train," he said.

They drove faster. To Amy it looked as if the way they were going would take them precisely away from the train, which was still very far off, but approaching nevertheless. What was all this?

As if in answer, as if talking to some rider who could understand what Amy could not, Mr. Billow said in a conversational monotone, "Innocent young girls shouldn't grow up to the wickedness of this evil world. They should keep their innocence till the end of their lives." They drove still faster. Somehow she could hardly breathe.

"Just spend their time as innocent young girls," Mr. Billow went on presently. He sounded pitiful. Yes, and terrible! "Not grow up to be snares and delusions full of Adam's sin."

Her ears were buzzing. He must be mad! But how could she escape? He was urging the horse on now with hard slaps of the reins. Suddenly she saw why they had come the way they had.

The lane along which they were speeding made a demoniac double to the left around a tall aimless length of fence. It then became a scraggly open road which crossed the railroad tracks. They were nowhere near the depot. The tracks stretched away to an endless vanishing point in a scene without houses, without people, without help or rescue.

Mr. Billow wrenched the reins, the horse reared and floundered as the buggy rocked, and then they were bumping over the railroad ties between the rails. The sun shone about them hot but grayish, and a chilly sweat ran down Amy's spine.

She tried to say, "Mr. Billow, where are we going?" but no words came. Far behind, the train-whistle let loose a long wailing for a crossing. They were driving ahead of the coming locomotive!

To Amy's unbelieving eyes Mr. Billow's face still wore the same expressionless shell it has assumed when he had seen the doll she was still clutching tighter and tighter. Her last link with home, with life itself!

Suddenly she heard a low vibrant humming. For one instant she looked quickly over her shoulder. The smoke in the sky! The train!

It was in sight, it was coming. So fast, so near! The humming grew louder, more metallic. The frightened horse was galloping now. Behind her Amy could hear the thunder of the train, could almost feel the approaching grind of the driver wheels, the weight of the cow-

catcher, the crash of death itself.

Suddenly Mr. Billow, with a quick twist, knotted the reins into a loop and gripped it between his knees. He turned toward Amy. In that ghostly instant she saw his face come alive like a devil's mask lit by a flash of sulphur, and his hands reached for her throat.

Quicker than thought, she understood his purpose: to wring her neck, leave her in the speeding buggy to be demolished by the train while he risked a leap to safety and freedom. Quicker than thought, she thrust at him with all her might with the only thing she had: the doll. Anything to keep him off! He reeled, arms in air, against the right side of the buggy as the blood poured from his stabbed eye.

At that instant the left rear wheel bounced up and tilted over the left-hand track. The weight of Mr. Billow's body toppled the buggy to the right: it overturned.

Amy was flung clear, the gravel shredding her shins, the armholes of her dress bursting like the pull of the ligaments in her wrenched ankle, the doll's wax face crushing as she rolled it against the ground.

The maddened horse made a tremendous leap and dragged the buggy clear of the tracks to the cinderbed beside them. Mr. Billow lay, inert and crumpled, upon the ties.

In the one panoramic instant before she fainted from pain, from fear, from relief, Amy saw him there, saw the train coming, in its aurora of steam, coal-dust and sparks, and saw the doll held in her unyielding grip, that substitute for Cousin George: filthy; smashed; with Mr. Billow's little knife, smeared with red to the hilt, still firmly hooked to one of its little buttons.

Cousin George had indeed done his duty.

Zusman

# APPLEBY'S FABLES

by MICHAEL INNES

## NEWS OUT OF PERSIA

"I seem to have heard of such things happening in America," I said.

Appleby nodded. "Well, yes. Sometimes an author there meets with sudden and quite staggering financial success. And he just can't take it, and proceeds to blow his brains out. But it wasn't like that with Dobson here in London. It's true that Dobson had achieved marked success—and rather late in his career as a writer. But his new standing had already been an established fact for several years."

"He'd rather altered his manner of writing, hadn't he?"

"Very decidedly. His earlier books had been high-brow and difficult. Then he changed, and produced three short novels of a much more popular sort. But they were genuinely good—quite dazzlingly good—of their kind. The most distinguished critics had expressed a high respect for Raymond Dobson's later work. So it might be said that he was sitting very pretty. As a matter of fact, the third of those novels, *Meeting at Mâcon,* had just been published—and was clearly in for a big success—when the thing happened. You recall the circumstances?"

I shook my head. "I don't think I ever heard about them."

"Dobson had put in a quiet morning working in his study. A

batch of press-cuttings had come in by the first post, and he had given some time to pasting them into an album. It was a job he liked doing himself."

"He was a conceited sort of chap?"

"Possibly you might call him that. But vanity is a widespread trait among authors. They like to linger over laudatory notices, even when they know they mean very little. Anyway, that was what Dobson had been doing. Then he walked into his secretary's room and told her to ring up the police. She was puzzled, and asked what she was to tell them. 'Tell them they're needed here,' Dobson said. Then, just as the secretary had got through to the local station, he produced an old army revolver and shot himself dead."

"Wasn't that rather inconsiderate?" I asked.

"It was. The poor young woman appeared to get a terrible shock. When the police did arrive, they found her flat on the floor. Her name, by the way, was Grace Shaw. She hadn't been with Dobson long. But she seemed very much affected, all the same."

I considered this beginning of Appleby's narrative for some seconds. "I distrust your Grace Shaw," I said.

My friend laughed. "Well, you must distrust someone. And, so far, Grace is the only person available. She doesn't require much documenting. She'd worked for a publisher, she'd worked for a printer, and she'd spent a couple of years in some unknown job in Paris. Later, Dobson took her on. He was a bachelor, and she simply went in by the day. It was all perfectly respectable. Indeed, there seemed nothing about Dobson that wasn't."

"No background for blackmail, or anything like that?"

"I couldn't discover any. And his doctor assured me that he was in perfectly sound health."

"Overwork, and a fit of depression—something like that?"

"There was no sign of it. And Dobson wasn't a purely sedentary type. In fact, he'd done some pretty adventurous things. Did you ever hear of a young Australian called Ron Lewis? He was a Sydney man, who had spent a couple of years on the continent and begun to make a bit of a name for himself as a poet. He and Dobson—who was much older—became acquainted, and decided to do some exploring together."

This stirred some recollection in my mind. "Persia?" I asked.

"Yes, Persia. Perhaps exploring is too grand a term for their proceedings. They took a car with some notion of motoring pretty well all the way to Australia. But in Persia young Lewis caught some bug and died. Dobson was said to have behaved very well. He put up a tough fight for his young friend's life. And then, when it was all over, he went on to Australia, saw Lewis's people,

and said and did all the right things."

"Did the experience," I asked, "have any effect on Dobson's writing?"

"Well, it was after Lewis's death —which had apparently been a pretty ghastly business—that his books took on their new tone. Superficially, it was rather surprising. You might have expected a *deepening* of tone—but the actual transition was to something *lighter*. Acute critics said that Dobson's ordeal had enabled him to quit trying to be something he was not, and to write in a simple and unaffected way."

Again I considered the course of Appleby's story. "Raymond Dobson's writing," I said, "seems to remain in the picture. Did it turn out to have a key place in the mystery?"

Appleby shook his head. "Raymond Dobson's writing," he said, "turned out to have no place in the mystery at all. But Ron Lewis's did."

"The young man's poetry?" I asked.

"No, not his poetry. But let me tell you how I worked it all out. It wasn't a spectacular process; it was a thoroughly plodding one. I began by tracing Dobson's movements back, month by month and year by year, until I had a fairly good notion of them over a period of some six years all told. And I discovered one curious thing. He appeared never to have been in Burgundy."

I stared. "Burgundy? Dobson was interested in wine?"

"An interest in wine might, of course, take you to Mâcon—although you'd be more likely to frequent the Côte d'Or itself, rather farther north. But the point of interest was rather different. *Meeting at Mâcon* didn't strike me as a book written by a man who hadn't been there. In fact it was the work of somebody with the place pretty fresh in his mind. That was queer, wouldn't you say?"

"Very queer indeed."

"The next step I'll tell you about is simply one among a great many that I took more or less in the dark. I cabled to the police in Sydney. They discovered that Ron Lewis, although he had been away from his people for so long, was a dutiful and regular correspondent. And there were letters from Mâcon stretching over something like a couple of months."

"My dear Appleby—theft! Plagiarism!"

"Quite so. Lewis had written three short novels. But he was a perfectionist, and he hadn't been able to bring himself to take any steps toward publishing them. They were with him on the Persian journey, and Dobson found them after his death. Later, when Dobson went on to Sydney, he made sure that Lewis's people had no inkling of the novels' existence."

"So there was an enormous temptation?"

"Yes. Dobson realised at once the quality of the work that had come

so strangely into his hands. And he stole it."

I turned it all over in silence. "And he was stricken by shame and remorse, and so made away with himself?"

"Not precisely that. He had learnt from Lewis that there had been nobody in Europe in his confidence; nobody who knew anything about any of his writings. But that hadn't been quite true. Lewis was concealing something—something he didn't want to talk about. In Paris he had been in love with a young English girl called Grace Shaw. And she had in fact had some glimpses of the manuscripts of the books. When she came upon the first of them after its publication, with Dobson's name on the title page, she at once suspected the truth. The appearance of the second book confirmed her suspicion. Of course she was powerless to prove anything. But eventually she managed to get that job with Dobson."

"And *then*?" I asked.

Appleby smiled grimly. "Can't you guess?"

"Certainly I can't guess."

"Those press-cuttings. They weren't all just laudatory reviews of *Meeting at Mâcon*. One was from a Sydney newspaper. Or at least it looked as if it was. Grace, remember, had worked with a printer, and could easily get a bogus clipping prepared—no doubt with some vague story of a joke. And she slipped it into the batch that morning."

"Whatever did it say?"

"It announced the discovery—to the surprise of his family—of a quantity of manuscript material in the handwriting of Ron Lewis, a young poet whose career had been cut short by his death in Persia. What was in question appeared to be the drafts of several novels, including one set in a small wine-growing town in the south of France. The material was being examined by a Professor of Literature at Sydney University."

"So Dobson knew it was all up?"

"He *thought* it was all up. When he had shot himself, the girl of course destroyed the bogus cutting. Her lover was avenged."

I managed to smile. Appleby, I must own, was beginning to get on my nerves. "It's such a horrible story," I said, "that I've no doubt it leads you to some highly edifying conclusion."

But Appleby shook his head. "This one," he said, "is like Dr. Johnson's *Rasselas*. It has a conclusion in which nothing is concluded. Good night."

# IN THE BAG

Partington House presented a forlorn appearance as Appleby kicked the snow from his shoes and hurried in. The bleak thin light of a winter morning made the splendid rooms seem pretentious and uneasy. And the dismal effect was increased by the litter left over from the party of the night before. There were champagne glasses on the floor, and in the great green and gold drawingroom nobody had turned out the lights on the Christmas Tree.

It had been very much a Christmas party. Lord Partington himself gave evidence of this when Appleby was ushered into his presence in the library. There was still a smear of red grease-paint high on one cheekbone. And—what made his appearance really fantastic—he had failed to remove two tufts of white cotton-wool from above his eyebrows. Lord Partington, clearly, had been representing Father Christmas. He did that at this fancy dress party every year—making a spectacular appearance and disappearance, it was said, on a sledge, and presenting his guests with presents conceived on rather a lavish scale. Lord Partington, in fact, had a showy side. And this annual party, given not to children but to bored grown-ups, was an expression of it.

"It was enormously valuable, you know," Lord Partington began abruptly. "The Whang Vase, it's called. An ancestor brought it from Pekin. Pretty well stole it, I dare say."

Appleby nodded. "And now it has been stolen from you?"

"Yes—during my party. And when I wasn't three paces from it, if you ask me. You saw that Christmas Tree? The Whang Vase stood in an alcove just beside it. It's a large pot-bellied affair about three feet high. I can't say I ever saw much in it myself. But it's enormously valuable, as I say."

"But surely, Lord Partington, it could hardly be worth much to a thief? If he tried to dispose of it, it would be identified at once?"

"That's the deuce of it, my dear fellow. Those affairs go, it seems, in pairs. Somewhere in the world there's a missing Whang Vase, identical with mine. So it's open to anybody who gets hold of mine to invent some cock-and-bull story about having picked it up in a junk shop."

"And when was the disappearance discovered?"

"Quite late, when most of my guests had left. I must say your people were here in no time. They'll have told you how the thing was done?"

Appleby nodded. "I gather that your butler found a window open on a staircase at the back of the house, and a rope trailing down from it into a yard. It seems an odd way to make off with a large fragile object."

"Quite so." Lord Partington nervously lit a cigarette. "But nobody, you see, could have walked out of the front door with that great thing without being spotted by half-a-dozen servants. And the same goes for any route through the kitchens and so forth. But once down that rope and into the yard, the fellow could get away easily."

"I see. Well, I think I'll have a look at that window."

It was twenty minutes before Appleby returned to the library. "I'm afraid," he said, "that I must ask some questions about your guests."

Lord Partington was startled. "My guests? You think one of them made off down that rope?"

"I don't think that anybody did. The rope is a mere false trail. And whoever arranged it didn't reckon with the snow. There's an untrodden carpet of it in that yard. So that's that."

"But suspecting my guests just doesn't make sense. None of them could have got away with it."

"That may be so." Appleby paused for a moment. "But a few of them, at least, must be thoroughly familiar with your house?"

"Certainly."

"Then one of them may simply have hidden the thing until he—or she—can collect it on a favourable occasion. There must, after all, be a hundred hiding places in a great mansion like this."

Lord Partington stood up abruptly. "I can't believe it," he said. "That it should still be here isn't a possible solution at all."

It was only after close questioning that Lord Partington let slip the rather special position of his old friend Colonel Wain, who was an authority on Chinese pottery, with connections among collectors in many parts of the world. But Wain had never been a man of wealth. And now, Lord Partington believed, he was having difficulty in making both ends meet. "But that, you know," he said drily to Appleby, "doesn't necessarily make him a thief."

"Of course it doesn't. But we must keep an eye on him, all the same. Do you remember when he left your party? No? He wasn't conspicuous? What sort of costume did he come in to this fancy dress affair of yours?"

For a second Lord Partington

hesitated. "I don't remember," he said.

Appleby found Colonel Wain in his flat off Piccadilly. He was an elderly hard-bitten man with keen grey eyes. Appleby was a little startled to find him sitting in the company of the Home Secretary. "You've come about this theft?" Wain asked.

"Yes, Colonel. But I mustn't disturb you when you are with Mr. Mellanby."

"Never mind Mellanby." Wain barked this out. "He and I are old friends. Go ahead. What do you want to know?"

"I want to know in what costume you went to Lord Partington's last night."

There was a silence—and then Wain gave an odd sigh. "I went as a postman," he said. "And you'll be quite right if you suppose that part of the outfit consisted of a large sack." He turned to Mellanby. "What do you think, Jim?"

"That you'd better tell the truth. Or shall I do it for you?"

"Please do." Wain looked curiously aged and broken. "I never thought it would come to this."

"The Colonel and I left Partington's affair together." Mellanby was accustomed to waste no words. "And in our taxi he asked me to search that postman's bag. It contained empty cardboard boxes—nothing else. Can you take my word for that?"

Appleby smiled. "Yes, Minister, I think I can." He turned to Wain. "Just what had Lord Partington done?"

"He took advantage of some distraction to slip *his* bag—Father Christmas's, you know—over the Vase. And then he gathered it up and had himself drawn out of the drawing-room on his ridiculous sledge. I was the only man who spotted the manoeuvre—in the East, you know, one gets into the way of keeping one's eyes open—and I was absolutely astounded. Then I remembered that Partington had made a great point of my coming as a postman, bag and all. It was a plot against me." Wain's voice faltered. "And he is one of my oldest companions."

"It was certainly a plot, sir. He arranged a very palpable false trail with a rope from a window, such as a not-too-clever guest might have contrived in order to suggest an outside job. And then, in talking to me, he managed to bring you, Colonel, into the picture in a thoroughly suspicious way. Nothing could ever be proved against you, of course. But, having left Partington House with that bulky bag, you would be a suspect to point to when the matter was being investigated by the insurance people."

Wain nodded slowly. "And that is what it was about?"

"Certainly. Lord Partington stole his own Whang Vase in order to collect the insurance on it, and sub-

sequently to sell it quietly as the twin of the one that had ostensibly been stolen from him. There would be a double profit."

Mellanby stood up. "And Partington?" he asked. "Will *he* ever be more than a suspect?"

Appleby shook his head. "I'm afraid not, Minister. The first move we make will alarm him, and the Vase will just unobtrusively turn up in Partington House again. A bad business."

Mellanby nodded, and turned to Wain. "A bad business, indeed. We can't even throw him out of the club."

Wain looked at his friend in sombre dismay. "Yet one couldn't belong to the same club as a fellow like that. We'll have to resign ourselves."

Appleby looked at the two perturbed gentlemen. "At least, a reflection of general usefulness emerges. One doesn't necessarily get away with a thing even when one is quite sure one has it in the bag."

# THE PRIEST'S HOLES

"And do the Poynts still live here?" I asked Appleby, as we stood together with a little crowd of potential sightseers on the step of Poynt Hall.

"Yes. It's part of the attraction of the place—that it's still more or less lived in by the original family. What Richard Poynt has done is to carve a small modern flat out of one wing. He could use the whole house, but it would be pretty comfortless, I imagine."

"You know him, then?"

Appleby shook his head. "We are more or less neighbours, as you can see. But I've done no more than pass the time of day with him. And I don't think he'll recognise me. Poynt is a retiring sort of fellow. His earlier life is said to have been marked by some obscure tragedy or misfortune, from which he has never really recovered."

I was surprised. "But, nevertheless, we're going to see him?"

"It's quite probable. He often takes a party round himself. He has quite a turn for showmanship. Particularly in the matter of the priest's holes."

"Ah, yes." I had been told about these. The Poynts were a Roman Catholic family, and Poynt Hall was chiefly famous because one of Richard Poynt's ancestors had ex-

pended fabulous ingenuity in constructing these hiding places for the priests who, at the risk of their lives, had gone secretly about the country in the time of the Penal Laws. "I think you said there are twelve?"

Appleby nodded. "Yes, you'll see twelve. And there's a thirteenth that is never shown."

"Because thirteen's unucky?"

"Not exactly. If Richard Poynt takes us round, he'll explain. He makes quite a little drama out of it."

And it was in fact the owner who showed us Poynt Hall. He was in late middle-age—grey haired, tall and distinguished. He collected our half-crowns without a shadow of awkwardness, and then at once began a pleasantly informal but clearly well-practiced outline of the place's history. His sentences dropped from him easily, and with little pauses that gave a great effect of leisure. He might simply have been our host, responding to our interest in his house, but careful not to obtrude upon us more information than was desired.

There were almost a dozen of us —sightseers of the slightly specialised sort that makes its way to the remoter and smaller show places of England. But only one of our number, an elderly American who appeared to be by himself, showed much sign of any special knowledge, whether architectural or historical. He was following Richard Poynt's remarks closely, and more than once I found myself glancing at him with curiosity. There was something obscurely familiar about him.

We were half-way up a shallow wooden staircase when Poynt stooped and tuggled at one of the treads. "And here," he said, "is the first of the places you have perhaps particularly come to see."

It was certainly an extremely clever hiding place—a small square chamber concealed beneath a sort of trap-door constituted by two of the steps. The American pressed forward and regarded it curiously. "I guess this one would have been the first to be constructed?" he asked.

"We believe that to be so." Poynt seemed slightly surprised, and then went on with his explanations. It struck me now that beneath his courtesy there was a deep reserve; that here was, in fact, a singularly proud and sensitive nature. Appleby, I concluded, had shown tact in not claiming Poynt's acquaintance upon this occasion.

The tour continued. Poynt Hall, although impressive from its antiquity and mellow beauty, was not really a large place; and it was possible to linger pleasantly in its comparatively few principal chambers. Its compactness rendered all the more remarkable the sequence of hiding places which were revealed.

And these were a great success with the little crowd of sightseers. As a panel slid back, a solid bookcase turned on a pivot, a fireplace revealed the rungs of an iron ladder, there were gasps of admiration and surprise. It was like stuff out of a boy's adventure story. I thought how strange it was that Richard Poynt's ancestor should have combined with the grim and honourable business of protecting the priests who came to him this sheer virtuosity and exuberance in adding hiding place to hiding place.

The American went on asking intelligent questions and even offering relevant information. He seemed to make Richard Poynt a shade restless —and at the same time to be himself a little nettled by Poynt's particular blend of courtesy and reserve.

Presently the twelfth priest's hole —a very small one in the floor of a privy—had been revealed to us. "And that is all," Richard Poynt said. "There is in fact a thirteenth hiding place. But it is never disclosed. An interesting family tradition attaches to it. When religious tolerance had been established, and these places were no longer needed, the head of my family decided that one should nevertheless remain secret, with its whereabouts known only to one Poynt in each generation. It's a small square chamber, with just room for a chair in which a man can sit. But I mustn't show it to you."

"I can't say I ever heard of most of this," the American said.

"Possibly not, sir. But so it is. The idea was, of course, that one cannot tell what revolutions history will bring about. The time might always come when an inviolate hiding place might again be useful."

Poynt had spoken with some warmth of feeling. But the American asked another question. "And when do you figure it that this tradition began?"

"At the end of the seventeenth century, sir."

"It sounds more like the end of the eighteenth to me—when folks got around to reading Sir Walter Scott's novels. Most ancient family traditions date from then, I guess."

Poynt made no reply to this. The two men had now definitely got across each other. Our party moved on into a bedroom, handsomely equipped with Tudor furniture. Against one wall was an unusually large *prie-dieu*, elaborately carved. "That's very fine," the American said, and stepped over to it.

Poynt nodded. "Yes," he said rather drily. "It has often been admired."

And now something wholly surprising happened. The American put out both hands, and gave a quick twist to a pillar. The whole *prie-dieu* moved sideways. We were looking into a small square chamber with a single chair. And slumped in the chair was a human skeleton.

There was a moment's silence—

and then somebody screamed. I glanced at Poynt, who had gone deadly pale. Then Appleby stepped forward, grasped the *prie-dieu,* and swung it into place again. "That," he said firmly to the company at large, "is simply rather a macabre joke which Mr. Poynt prepares for over-curious visitors. We'll move on."

Later, Appleby explained. He had had a brief talk with the owner of Poynt Hall.

"Our American friend," he said, "is a Poynt. Once you know, you see the family likeness at once. His branch of the family left England centuries ago, but he takes a keen interest in his English connections. He knows all about the architecture of the Hall and its various priest's holes. And of course he was quite right about the thirteenth. The tradition about keeping it secret is a comparatively recent affair. But it proved very useful to Richard Poynt when, years ago, his younger brother Edwin, who was thought to be dead, came home in some deep disgrace, and then died in the night."

I was astounded. "You mean—?"

"Just that. It was something about a sinking ship. Edwin simply ought not to have survived. But now, by an extraordinary chance, he had died of some injury he had received—and before anybody except Richard knew of his arrival. So Richard simply put the body where he was quite sure it couldn't be discovered."

"But afterwards?"

"He could simply never bear to go back."

I considered for a momentt. "Do you think," I asked presently, "that, as a policeman, you have acted in a wholly regular way?"

Appleby didn't seem impressed by this question. "One must back up a neighbour, you know," he said.

"And I suppose," I asked somewhat acridly, "that this shocking affair has its moral too?"

Certainly. However excellent one's cupboards, it's wise to clear out the family skeletons from time to time."

# FATHER AND SON

"The Pellows," Appleby said, "are all eccentric. And Charles Pellow was a case in point. He was just beginning to make a name for himself on the stage when he threw up the career for no reason at all and took to meddling in archaeology. Then he did some exploring, and after that he bought himself a hotel."

"Pots of money," I said.

"Well, there was certainly money in the family. Charles's father, Adrian Pellow, was a very wealthy man indeed; and it was understood that Charles was his heir. They were on quite good terms, and Adrian would come down to the hotel from time to time and put up in a sort of self-contained flat in one wing. That was the position when I happened to go down there for a couple of weeks myself."

"It was at the seaside?"

"Yes—a pleasant enough place on an unfrequented and rather rocky stretch off the south coast. I enjoyed my fortnight very much. But it had an unexpected ending."

"Connected with the eccentricity of the Pellows?" I asked.

"Most decidedly."

"Adrian Pellow," Appleby went on, "was a picturesque old fellow with a flowing white beard. He didn't very often emerge from his own quarters. When he did, it was mostly to go for solitary walks along the coast, poking about among the rock-pools. He wasn't exactly unsociable. But, at the same time, he had an odd impulse to keep his distance. He would wave his stick in a threatening way if strangers showed any sign of approaching him. Even with his acquaintances he would often converse at shouting distance."

"Wasn't that rather tiresome?"

"There wasn't much of it. He had violent political convictions; and every now and then he would stride through the lounge, or appear at a window or on a terrace, and bellow a sentence or two directed against the Government. It must have been a little awkward for his son Charles, who naturally didn't want his guests embarrassed. It struck me after a few days that some of them were getting edgy. And it seemed to me that it had struck Charles too, and that he was taking the *hôtelier's* first and almost instinctive precaution in such circumstances."

"Rather more to eat?"

"Just that. Or rather, in this case, a great deal more to eat. Our meals became quite astonishingly lavish. It was almost puzzling."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "Charles

Pellow was thinking of throwing in his hand as a hotel-keeper, just as he had as an actor and an archaeologist? Perhaps he was doing you all, as it were, a final blow-out?"

Appleby shook his head. "Funeral baked meats," he said. "At least you could almost call it that, although they were just a little premature. For it was about a week after this that old Adrian Pellow was found drowned. His body was washed up among the rocks."

"An accident?" I asked.

"So we were at once assured. But it quickly got round, somehow, that he had probably committed suicide. Of course the fact that his conduct was so strange encouraged the idea. And during the preceding four or five days he had become very elusive. He would stick his head through a door, brandish a newspaper, shout something about the criminal folly of one parliamentary bill or another, and then vanish. I had a notion that he had convinced himself the country was on the very verge of ruin at last. It seemed possible that his mind had become so obsessed with this that it had entirely lost its balance."

"One hears of that sort of thing. Of course there is always some underlying disturbance. The anxiety about the state of the country and so forth is mere rationalisation."

"No doubt." Appleby didn't seem much impressed by this. "But as to its being suicide—well, further evidence turned up. A note was found on the body. It was no more than a couple of lines on the top of a sheet of writing paper. Their immersion in the sea had made them almost indecipherable. But they could, in fact, just be made out. And they seemed extremely significant. What Adrian Pellow had written was: '*I have taken this step at the earliest possible moment*'." Appleby paused. "Now, what do you make of that?"

I shook my head. "It sounds like suicide, all right. But I can't say I make much of it. Why should one speak of taking one's life at the earliest possible moment? It doesn't make sense." Then suddenly light broke on me. "Life assurance! There's often a clause invalidating a policy if the insured person takes his own life within a year."

Appleby nodded. "Not quite that," he said. "But you're in the target area. It emerged at the inquest that Adrian Pellow had made an extensive settlement of his property some years before. That meant, of course, that he had to survive to a certain date if his trust deed was to be valid. Well, his death appeared to have taken place just a couple of days after that date had passed."

I thought for a moment, and then glanced mistrustfully at Appleby. "It sounds plain sailing. Adrian Pellow stuck it out until he knew that his son Charles would benefit by the settlement becoming valid in law. And then he drowned himself."

Appleby shook his head. "You've forgotten something. You've forgotten what had been happening to our hotel meals that week."

I stared at my friend. He appeared to be talking nonsense. "Explain yourself," I said.

He nodded. "Those heavy meals gave me one or two sleepless nights. In more senses than one, they worried me. So I did a little insist on thorough inquiry. But I can't explain just how the truth began to emerge. It was a very complicated medical matter—and there was no more than suspicion until Charles Pellow broke down under questioning."

I was horrified. "Charles Pellow! He had murdered his father?"

"Nothing like that. He had found his father's dead body in a rock-pool. Adrian Pellow's death was indeed a pure accident. But it had happened a fatal week too soon. The settlement was invalid. So Charles, you see, had a problem. He also had a deep freeze. All progressive hotel-keepers have."

"My dear Appleby!"

"Yes, it isn't pretty. He turned everything out of that deep freeze, and deposited his father's body in it. Then he told his staff some plausible story about its having broken down. That was why we had those tremendous meals. The ordinary refrigerator wouldn't hold all that food, so it had to be eaten. As I said —funeral baked meats."

"But surely Adrian Pellow would have been missed?"

"Charles Pellow was a professional actor, you remember. He simply impersonated his father. Adrian's extraordinary habits made it easy."

I was rather dazed by this time. "And then?" I asked.

"When the right date came round Charles got out the body and—so to speak—drowned it again. When found it thus presented every appearance of an almost freshly drowned man. Except, as I've said, that medical science when alerted proved a little too clever for Charles, after all. One of the pathologists got a line on the truth, and then Charles confessed."

"But that note?"

"Adrian Pellow used to put in a lot of time writing indignant letters about this and that to the Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Canterbury and I don't know whom else. He just had enough sense not to waste stamps posting them. Charles did a rummage through this stuff, and had the luck to find just what he wanted."

For a moment I digested all this in silence. I found it no easier than Appleby could have done with some of those heavy meals. "And has this story," I asked, "one of those morals that you have become so fond of drawing from your experiences?"

Appleby smiled. "Perhaps it holds a useful lesson in the field of finance. It's very dangerous to rely on frozen assets."

# THE saint's RATINGS

***A writer is a fool—***

*if he doesn't write for money. That's what old Ben Johnson said, or something very much like that. As a general rule you can't argue with it. But it's the sort of thing that's easily carried too far. Even the grubbiest hack writer in the old pulps managed to keep his story moving, hiding the skeleton of a plot under a covering of action. Today's paperback hacks can't even do that. The latest book received in one of these endless main-character series reeks of only one sincere emotion —boredom. The first few stories about this super-snoop were witty and interesting. This last one is plodding, written by reflex, filled with hanging characters and unresolved situations. It is clearly obvious that both writer and editor are bored with the series, but keep pumping the handle to sell the suckers. Shame, gentlemen! Your readers are smarter than that. They will see through your hypocrisy, and your only reward will be enough unsold copies to rebuild the Great Wall. If you keep turning out books like slicing off salami, you will soon find yourself chewing on the indigestible rind.*

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- Three haloes: Outstanding
- Two haloes: About average
- One halo: Passable reading:
- A pitchfork: For the ash can

**THE BEACH GIRLS, by John D. MacDonald (Gold Medal, 35¢)**

There's the feel of Florida here, the sound of waves on a boat's hull and the touch of sun-warmed flash. As well as death and violence. MacDonald does it again.

**SWEET WILD WENCH, by William Campbell Gault (Crest, 25¢)**

This book stands head and shoulders above the others listed below—but only because they are lying on their stomachs. Joe Puma makes like an alley cat, stalking death and blondes, as he patiently—and sometimes boringly—finds the killer.

**THE LUSTFUL APE, by Bruno Fischer (Gold Medal, 25¢)**

A badly-jointed story staggers across a thin crust of leeringly hinted-at sick sex. Keep your hands clean.

**UNCLE SAGAMORE AND HIS GIRLS, by Charles Williams (Gold Medal, 35¢)**

Shore enough, thur was this here city dude thought he'd write about mountain folk, revenooers, and suchlike. Cooked the whole mess up in a still and thought it would be plumb funny. Pore feller. His book aint funny or nuthin'. Though it's great to hang in . . .

**ASSIGNMENT—LILI LAMARIS, by Edward S. Aarons (Gold Medal, 35¢)**

Sam Durell—we *told* you to retire, all these girls have softened your brain. The word is out to the readers now to shoot you on sight. It's only self-defense.

Zusman

# ACCESSORY
## BEFORE THE FACT

**by RUSSELL JANNEY**

Miss Billie St. John was one of those personages that defy classification. To a baffling versatility that amounted to sheer genius in whatever she undertook, she added a variability of mood that was like the rays of some jewel.

You saw now gold, now crimson, now white—not to mention intermediate reflections in the scale of Life's great whirling chromatoscope, while beneath it all was the pure crystal of the flame welded stone that never was dulled for an instant either by luxury, or by the most bitter of disillusionments.

I write this before recording the several impressions of the day following, and the adventure of the Hannaman Ball—the second strange exploit in that summer of Arabian nights (and days) in which I first had my small share in her career.

To the world Billie St. John was just a rich idler, who raced horses and motor cars, and occasionally won a golfing championship with an ease that set the experts figuring.

The world did not know!

I had gone to bed exhilarated by that most potent of intoxicants—Romance.

I awoke to sordid reality—long overslept I feared—for bright sunshine was burning through the cracked blind of my single window.

From outside came no songs of larks, but the noises of the city; of a

Tenth Avenue city of banging garbage cans, clanging buses, a hurdy-gurdy playing a last year's tune. The window blind bulged with a sudden sweep of air, bringing in a stale, hot, fetid breath—the breath of that city sweltering in mid-summer heat and grime.

Had the whole adventure been just a dream—the meeting at Sherry's; the drive to Ossining; that mad race back to the dock of the Mauretania!*

This much *was* real at least; that I could still see Billie St. John's glorious eyes and hair and face; and feel the thrill of her touch as we shook hands across that red-candled Sherry's table in solemn compact of partnership.

And that partnership, she had assured me, was to make an immediate and active beginning.

"Before another twenty-four hours, this will be a very small part of the dividend due you!" she had laughed, when I balked at accepting the yellow bill of large denomination that she had pressed into my hand.

"I've found you at the crucial moment, not only for what we've done tonight, but for what must be tomorrow's enterprise!"

She knew that my dinner check had left me with but a single quarter.

"That won't go far toward the kind of breakfast I hope you'll feel like eating!" she added decisively.

Then: "And I want that football fob redeemed. You may present it to me, and I'll wear it as a mascot for the success of our firm! We are beginning back again, just after that last Harvard game, when nothing this side of Hell could daunt you—!"

Thus Billie St. John, half humorously, but mightily in earnest; her mouth smiling, but her face alive with determination. And as always, her flaming enthusiasm swept away the doubts.

Was all this a dream? Wrapped in my ancient and faithful dressing gown (I had clung to it along with my evening clothes and my walking stick as the last desperate symbols of a former prosperity) I felt in the inner pocket of the silk bordered tuxedo. The bill was there, yellow and crisp, giving the lie to doubts, to poverty, to failure.

If you have ever reached the very bottom of adversity, you will understand the magic of a crinkling, yellow bill. And besides, I had hope for future things! Yesterday despair, but today—partnership with the brilliant, the famous Miss St. John!

I stood up and breathed the rancid swelter from the streets; the scorched tin of the roof; the interior odors of fried onions that came through the broken glass of my transom—breathed deeply, gratefully!

It was indeed good to be alive.

It was nine-thirty. Two hours to wait. Meet Billie St. John at twelve o'clock. I would go to the Plaza for breakfast—crisp bacon and eggs, and griddle cakes, and a pot of fragrant

*—See I CROSS THE RUBICON, by Russell Janney (January 1960 *Saint Mystery Magazine*)

coffee! Then I would walk to Sixth Avenue and reclaim the little gold football. Then down to attempt a retrieving of my old rooms on Forty-fourth Street . . .

All this as I was shaving. Footsteps on my stairs, and a knock on my door, broke off the reverie.

"Come in!" I cried. Even my landlady was welcome that morning, for I could now pay up the three weeks rent, a wretched little sum that only a few tragic hours before I had planned to be met by the sale of my entire estate—two suits of clothes!

But the door jammed against the bolt I'd not yet drawn.

"One moment!" I called, and opened it.

In the half dark hallway a district messenger pushed out an envelope, a book, a pencil.

Wondering its sender, I automatically wrote my name. Then it came to me that there was only one person who knew that address, and my heart sank at a premonition of danger.

It was not a telegram, but a heavy white envelope that resisted my tearing fingers. The Sherry's monogram was in one corner, and my name and street typewritten.

"Answer?" asked the messenger. It was one of the pathetically elderly variety of messenger; a hunch-back it seemed, with a grey lined face, grey hair, stooped shoulders. There were folk, I thought, even worse off than I had been the day before! I at least had—if not youth—a healthy middle-age. Yet this pathetic figure had not quit the Life Game!

I looked at him more closely, for I saw something vaguely familiar about the narrow eyes that peered at me more sharply than necessary from under heavy eyebrows. But the hall was dark except for a single curtained window.

"Who gave you this?" I demanded, but did not pause for an answer as I strode hastily to my window, tearing open the envelope.

"Wait!" I called to the messenger, now framed in the doorway.

The contents, typed as the address, brought first astonishment and then fear that sent a pungent chill to my heart. I read its terse, brief wording a second time.

"Sir—So far you have not become a pre-arranged accomplice; your hands are still clean. Think well before you go farther with a certain lady whose motives you do not know. Prison is not a pleasant place. Do not become 'an accessory before the fact' in matters in which you need not be involved. This is a final warning."

"Accomplice" and "accessory before the fact" were underlined.

The thing was not signed.

I turned to my messenger, but no messenger was there! Rushing to the hallway, I could just see the top of the cap flights below.

I shouted a command to wait, but to no purpose. I sprang to the small window at the front of the hall and tore aside the dusty curtain just in time to see the cap and legs disap-

pear into a taxi that had obviously been waiting across the street. In another second the whole thing was beyond my view.

I returned to my room a sobered romancer. Who had written the letter, and who had brought it? Had I been followed the night before, by someone intent on frustrating whatever desperate business was involving Billie St. John! Was she herself in momentary danger, spied upon by the interests against whom she was fighting, her last night's work discovered?

I recalled the peering bearer of the letter with the vaguely familiar face and eyes. Where had I seen him? Was he one of the Sherry's waiters; one of the other guests? Fool, that I had let him get away! And I dressed quickly, and went out to seek a telephone.

She had told me the night before —when she had left me at my room, insisting on driving to her garage and her home alone—that she lived at the Hendrick Arms. I knew the name, however, as a certain magnificent apartment house that had been lately built on Riverside Drive. I found the number in the phone book.

She had left early, I was informed by the operator of the building switchboard. She would return at twelve. That was the hour of my appointment.

Well, I could only wait, and fret myself into a fever.

But if the letter had been sent to bring about my desertion to her cause, it was a complete failure. More than ever I wanted to share her jeopardy. Only—with the realization of her possible peril—a doubt, a tragic fear came over me that I could not fulfill the faith of this splendid girl; that I would somehow bring disaster to her, as I had brought it to every other thing that I had touched for three long years!

Perhaps I had already blundered—

So the letter also accomplished this, that I did not redeem the football fob, or go to the Plaza for my breakfast. Nor did I look for other rooms.

Instead, I carefully placed the yellow bill in a note book, and went to a cheap, much hated lunch room, where I made the best of a cup of coffee and a cereal. I had just a dime and a nickle left to reach the Hendrick Arms at Riverside and One Hundred and Tenth Street.

She must know her danger, then decide if she would place reliance on a failure and a bungler.

As I entered the subway, I found five pennies in an unexplored pocket, and bought a newspaper. There was no recording of the prison escape of the night before. Such things were suppressed, perhaps, till they were properly ferreted out.

To get my mind from a thousand conflicting doubts and fears, I commenced to read. Half way through some headlined article on an inside page, I found that I was reviewing the list of names of guests expected for the Oriental Ball taking place

that night at the multi-millionaire Hugo Hannaman's estate in Larchmont. Miss Billie St. John's name was not listed.

I threw down the paper in disgust.

Yet are the coincidents of life stranger even than those of fiction. Looking back, I recall that first casual subway-perusal of a memory branded event with a wry smile.

Said the colored hall-porter of the Hendrick Arms: "Miss St. John phoned she is detained. You are to go right up to her apartment."

The bronze elevator received me, and presently I pressed the button of a door directly opposite the twelfth floor exit.

A Japanese maid answered and bowed me in. I left my hat and stick in a dimly lighted reception hall. And I stepped for the first time into the spacious living room with its ceiling of two stories high, that looked far out over the Hudson.

I shall never forget that first impression of calm, of solid, of armored (I thought then) security, that the luxury of the room expressed.

"This is sanctuary!" breathed the broad sweeping lines of the dark, wainscoted walls and ceilings, relieved here and there by richest tapestry. Windows only along the front, but ten or twelve in number; tall, leaden-paned; opening inward at their perpendicular centers.

"This is assuagement!" echoed the furniture, of which one first noticed a massive table, a heavy writing cabinet, a long, high-backed settle, all of some richly carved Flemish design. There were a number of priceless bronzes, a great porcelain vase that stood in one corner flanked by screens of Japanese handwork in gold and grey and silver, a huge divan with a covering of gold-embroidered, Burgundy hued material.

Many chairs and smaller pieces were scattered about in apparent confusion, yet there was a grouping that gave the room an intimate feeling in spite of its extraordinary size. A polished black Steinway brought a modern note.

Several bronzed lamps hung by chains from the inlaid ceiling at irregular intervals, and a heavy Chinese teakwood lamp rose from the floor near the piano. Under foot was a huge Persian rug; while before the open fireplace opposite the windows, and flanked by two other settles, was a tiger-skin and head of magnificent coloring.

The far end of the wall was lined with bookcases—sober sets in orderly array; and in the far corner a dark, railed stairway rose abruptly to a small curved balcony halfway up the wall, and from this disappearing somewhere into the ceiling above.

There were a number of oils, but I was arrested immediately by a striking, unframed panel above the fireplace—a painting in bright color, and in lifesize detail, of what would appear to be some bow-and-arrowed outlaw of medieval England, leading a score of lusty followers.

I crossed and read a dull printed line in Old English script. It said: "*Ye Merrie Robin Hood Seeketh A Gueste For Dinner!*"

The hum of a concealed electric fan, and the faint stirring of the window curtains and the magazines and papers on the table, brought about a soothing coolness.

The strange thing—there was nothing at all to suggest it as the room of Billie St. John, famous sportswoman! No golf or racing trophies; no suggestion in photographs of horses or dogs; no trace of the African hunting trips for which she was famed, unless maybe the tiger-skin rug. The only touch of the open was this Robin Hood panel above the fireplace.

It might be the drawing room of an artist, or of an aesthetic devotee to shut-in ease and comfort. It was another riddle of this girl of mystery.

The silent maid brought cigarettes in a lacquered box, and a larger round and unopened tin of familiar look. They were the somewhat exclusive brand of cigars that I fancied—that I had ordered the night before at Sherry's!

It could not be an accident that her mistress now stocked them!

I had lit one of these, and sank back in a chair to let the protecting spirit of that room restore my calmness, when I caught the faint clang of the elevator, the turn of a key in the latch. As I got to my feet, Billie St. John stood in the doorway.

"So you are here, Jimsey—and I thought maybe you would not come—"

She eyed me laughingly, her head tossed back in the old gesture, and held out her hand.

She was in a trim blue serge that somehow combined simplicity and the Rue de la Paix. It typified its wearer, I thought, with her wide blue eyes of childish candor, yet in whose depths lurked a grey wisdom of something beyond all years.

"Not come!" I echoed. "I could not have remained away even if I wished!" And I gazed at her in unconcealed admiration.

She gave her hat to the maid—it was another wide brimmed creation of soft white straw, with a narrow velvet band of ribbon the same blue as her dress.

"One promises in the moonlight—or candlelight—" she explained, "and when the morning comes . . . were there no breakfast doubtings about sticking to a hasty bargain?"

Even now, after these years of partnership, I have not become used to her startling loveliness. What then on that first morning!

"I was never more sure!" I cried. "My only breakfast doubt has been that I could not measure up to all your faith in me."

She took a cigarette from the box, and tapped it on the table corner. How wonderfully long were her dark lashes as they lay for a moment against her cheek.

"My only fear is for your dreadful

earnestness." She looked up and laughed as she spoke. "It was proper for last evening perhaps, when we played at tragedy—"

She shuddered just a little. Was it a look of weariness that dulled her eyes for a fleeting moment? She took a quick, full breath, as if to banish with it all more serious memories. "But today we alternate with comedy—we're going out tonight for money—most madly humorous of all humorous things! I refuse to let the getting of money be a serious business either for you or for me!"

The getting of money! In her magnificent room, her modern castle high above the river, what did she know about the humor or seriousness of getting money? Her tone was unkind, and I imagined a thrust at my own failures; I answered quickly with more of a barb of bitterness than I perhaps intended.

"It's a pretty serious business when you must earn it yourself, and you cease to eat when you find that you cannot earn it!" I spoke and let my eyes travel again over her tapestries, her bronzes. "You ought to live on Tenth Avenue for a while," I added, "and see what I have seen."

She looked at me curiously, intently. "Would Rivington Street do just as well? And Christy Street—and Remington?"

Her tone was no longer flippant. It was deep and true, and a little unhappy. She came to me and touched my arm ever so lightly; I was sure then of the tired look behind her blue-grey eyes. And I regretted with all my soul my hasty curtness.

Before I could speak, she had continued with a little twisted smile. "I must laugh, Jimsie, so that I shall not weep. I did not mean to tell you yet, because you might misunderstand—I don't want you to think that it's to even up for this and this and this—" and she indicated the divan and the Steinway, and took up in her hands a crystal vase that reflected a hundred magic hues. "I make no apology for my extravagance—I was born to it—I like it—I've got to have it, just as I need my cars and my horses and dogs—but I've also got a sort of Settlement House down on the East Side, mostly for a lot of children whom I love, and I've lived down there nearly all this summer. I've even neglected my horses, though old Sandy MacDonald is the best of stepfathers—"

I broke in: "Please forgive me! I had no right—"

"There's nothing to forgive, but you must help me laugh when I come back up here, else I will plan willful murder instead of opera bouffe to cure some of my own and some of the world's injustices."

She walked over to a window and looked out to where storm clouds were rising above the Palisades. It was growing suddenly dark, and there was a distant rumble of thunder.

"I have to play the game my own absurd way," she said, turning, "—but I do try to *play the game*. I don't get my money, or my pleasures, or

my name in the newspapers by the suffering of others!"

"I didn't mean that!"

"The getting of money comes to that, usually," she said. "Perhaps after all, the gentleman above my fireplace had the only just idea—he robbed the rich to help the poor, and lived while he did it in a house of nature's own contriving."

She came back to her fireplace, and stood looking up at the panel. The figures in green and scarlet stood out even more strongly in the half light.

"Life's more complicated now—still—I wonder—"

So she spoke, and as she turned there formed a slow smile on her lips, and her mood of depression vanished. She did not speak again till she had lit her cigarette and was curled up in a huge arm chair, eyeing me with a speculative appraisal.

She said at last: "I'm trying to reckon just how far you'd be willing to go with me."

And with her words I remembered that warning letter in my pocket, a letter that her room and her charm had banished from my mind. I pulled it out now, and handed it to her.

"As far as this letter indicates and then some!" I cried impulsively. I meant it, and I wished to redeem my blundering speech of criticism.

She opened the note and read it slowly. But if its wording brought any tremor of alarm, I could not see it in the wide clear eyes that presently looked up at me. A faint smile played again about the mobile mouth.

"Did it upset you—this letter?" she asked.

"Only for your safety, and for the doubt it brought of my ability to aid you," I answered. "I have pretty much messed up my own affairs. I do not want to wreck yours also."

And I told her about the messenger and the taxicab; and the haunting face and eyes that had peered at me with more than messengerial interest.

Her eyes were dancing when I completed my tale, and she laughed with a real merriment.

"But if, as this note says, I do not keep within the law?"

"I have lost faith in myself, and I don't know why you should want me. But if you do, sitting here in broad daylight, knowing that someone wrote me such a letter, I'll go with you through anything, to anywhere!"

"And ask no questions—" she added with her little smile.

"And ask no questions! I know that you will always play the game. That is enough for me."

"Puts my boasting straight up to performance, doesn't it!" she laughed, "but I'll chance your verdict. And we'll now forget this letter for ever and ever. I know who wrote it. So much for their warning."

She tore it into pieces, and touched fire to them with her cigarette, so that they made a miniature bonfire on her silver ash tray.

"Watch them, Jimsey!" she cried, "It's the funeral pyre, I think, of all your days of law abiding virtue!"

When she had forced a smile also to my serious face, she crossed to her cabinet, unlocked a drawer, and took from it what appeared to be a bundle of newspaper clippings.

"It's just as well you know about the Settlement House," she said as she stood before me, "because some of the counters down there have got mixed up with the stakes of a personal game that gives me a sort of double-barreled interest in two of the greatest villains that ever appeared on any stage! I gave them a chance to come through about the East Side matter, was going to scratch my entry and call it quits on the private match, if they had. But they turned us down. Not only that, they used our kindly overtures to open another game with a crooked wheel—so its doubles *and* quits now—no prisoners taken—no quarter asked or given!"

With a grim laugh at her metaphorical melange, she handed me the clippings.

"Meet Mr. and Mrs. Hugo Hannaman," she said. "Read them up carefully, even if they bore you."

"A most strange coincidence!" I interjected. "Coming here on the subway I chanced to glance at the Society News page and looked to see if your name was among the guests of some ball they are giving at their Westchester Estate. Your name was not there."

"I will be there—and so will you, Jimsie" she said with a laugh. "We're going to their Ball tonight for my Rivington Street kiddies; for a selfish grievance; and for our firm! I'll go in now and see about our lunch, and try to plan just how we proceed. For they're very blasé—the Hannamans—and we must compete with Oriental costumes, several fortunes in jewelry, and—I read—a tenor from The Metropolitan Opera!"

She left me with the clippings, and a new disquietude.

The reader may or may not remember the Hugo Hannamans, their spectacular rise and abrupt disappearance from the public view. Just then they were at the height of their career as New York's most blatant *noveau riche*.

The erstwhile Chicago grain speculator had acquired a Fifth Avenue residence; had moved up to the dignity of a Wall Street business address; was indulging in full page stock market advertisements, a racing stable and a yacht.

His wife was adding to the publicity with her efforts to break into so-called "Society"; the marrying of her sister to a titled Austrian; her latest purchase of jewelry which she wore (and was pictured in) on all possible occasions; her well press-agented charities.

Returning from her first European sojourn with a new assortment of diamonds, gowns, dinner ideas, scandals, and a more or less shopworn but marriageable English Duke in tow, it was a humorous commentary on our boasted democracy that the Duke proved to be the stake-horse that was

carrying their socially trailing colors to a triumphant front.

The newspapers were responding, knowing what their readers wanted; the entertainments at the Hannaman summer place at Larchmont on the Sound were no longer attended only by the natives and the servants. The Ball that night was a sort of climax; they (and their Duke) had been invited to spend the next month at the Rhode Island Trouville, where sundry triumphs in jewelry and gowns were to be achieved.

I knew all this in a general way. I reviewed it in much particular from the complete set of newspaper clippings that it seemed strange Billie St. John should trouble to keep.

I did not yet know the deadly precision with which she followed any one of the many interests that at times engrossed her.

A single clue to her personal interest in the Hannamans lay in an article about their Larchmont estate. The place was called "Sherwood." It had been built by Billie's father, and owned by him till the time of his suicide.

How the Hannamans concerned her East Side Settlement enterprise I could not imagine.

Not till the end of a very excellent luncheon would she return to them. But through the meal she seemed preoccupied, and now and then would frown or smile for no reason connected with our desultory conversation. Back in the living room over our coffee—and when I had lit another cigar with the relish following a six months fasting—she resumed the subject.

"I've been a stupid hostess at our first luncheon, but when you can link a public benefice to your private grudge, its an opportunity one must do one's best with! You've read the clippings carefully?"

"Nearly all," I said, "enough to find out that the Hannamans are a most energetic pair!"

She smiled dryly.

"The clippings don't begin to do them justice—cover only one side of their precious activities. No mention at all, for example, that the gentleman has been adding to his income from stock market killings by a nice, safe little corner on this summer's milk and ice supply!

"The stock market doesn't matter to me, and at the worst he's only robbing some men and women who are full grown and able to fight back. But the milk and ice thing has robbed a lot of my kiddies down on the East Side who can't fight back—some of them have even died, when we found out too late from parents whose pride wouldn't let them ask for help—"

She got up and walked over to the fireplace. Her lips were tight; her chin was a hard line, like a man's.

"Yes?"

"I thought, perhaps, Mr. Hannaman did not understand all the brutal misery that trails this particular kind of business piracy. So I made it plain with several children for him

to look at—children we'd found that morning."

"You went to see him?"

"Not myself. There are reasons why it would not do for me to go. I sent my Matron and the children."

"What happened?"

She slowly clenched her hands. Into her eyes crept that same look of fury I had seen the night before, when I had braked the speed of the Mercedes.

"By God! Jimsie! There'll be no quarter!" She stopped herself, and relaxed her fingers with an effort. "But I should not get excited, for he only ran true to form. When he had finished cursing his secretary for letting them in; he looked at them and laughed, just as he laughed one other time I know about. Then he ordered them out of his office, and threatened to swear out warrants if he was disturbed again!"

"But isn't there some law for *him*!"

She smiled then, and came back to her chair.

"Thank you for breaking the tension. The law, my friend, is busy this particular summer trying to prevent you and me from laying odds on our favorite horse, running out under God's blue sky. One of the cleanest sports; one of the really splendid sights still left in a machine-mad world! It isn't legal to bet on that, but it's perfectly right to play a sure thing like a fake stock, or the summer's milk and ice! We're gamblers if we follow horses, but we're business men if we follow the other game!"

She lit a cigarette to hide another rising emotion.

"You musn't let me talk like this," she said, "for the Hannamans aren't worth murder, as I mentioned before. That would only give them another notice in the papers with a list of his securities and her charities—"

She had managed a sardonic smile again.

"I think I read in the final clipping that Mrs. Hannaman intended starting a fund for free milk—" I began.

"To be purchased of his company! Their new idea of efficient philanthropy! I forgot to tell you that Hannaman sent his secretary down the hall after my emissaries to suggest that they see Mrs. Hannaman—'she attended to his charities', they were told. He'd been so enraged that he'd overlooked this bet to play both ends against the middle! I've no doubt he took it up with her that night, with secret thoughts of how to boost the prices a little higher to cause a little more distress, and so make her charity a front page feature . . . milk went up two cents more this morning! . . .

"I wonder which is the worst—the frankly unscrupulous men like him, or the scheming women who seek a cheap publicity by public contributions to charities they know the business methods of their men have caused! I know which I despise the most."

"So you are going to take a hand?"

"The thing has been—to find a way the Hannamans will understand.

They are not highly sensitized. But I think I've got the combination. Their pocketbooks; their pride! To make them pay and make them ridiculous; and maybe put the fear of justice into their hearts—though I'd like nothing better than to hang up the gentleman and his lady by the thumbs—!"

She changed the subject abruptly: "It's to be an Oriental Ball tonight—an Oriental Ball against the background of my splendid Anglo-Saxon Sherwood!"

"Your father sold them the place?"

"They—acquired it. But that's not what I hold against them. On the contrary I am grateful, for it's turned out to be a splendid piece of luck. It gives me another card or two that I can play if need be—"

A wistful, far-away look crept to her eyes.

She continued: "It's a fine old place, Jimsie, but I couldn't have lived there again, any more than I could have stayed at the house on Madison Avenue. Father and I planned it out one summer, it was after my Freshman term at Bryn Mawr. The next year it was my birthday present. You see, I'd made a little hit in a 'Robin Hood' play at the college; I was all excited about the old Ballad stories. Only girls were in the cast, of course, and I was chosen for the chief outlaw himself, and wore a suit of real Lincoln green—"

Suddenly she jumped up and clapped her hands.

"I've got it, Jimsey!" she cried, "The very thing that will make our plan complete; the touch I have been hunting for all day!"

Her face was ablaze with life, her eyes flashing with some sudden inspiration.

"Wait here!" she cried, and fairly ran to the stairway I had noticed at the far corner of the room, and dashed up its steep pathway.

"It's in my tower room!" she cried, whirling and leaning out from the little balcony, then disappeared above.

I had noticed the two square towers that topped the Riverside corners of the Hendrick Arms. So here was the use of one of them! A castle in a flat, in the very heart of the modern city!

She was down again in a few moments with a long cardboard box, and she opened it and held up a suit of green and buff and crimson, complete from soft leather shoes to a little hat.

"My old Bryn Mawr costume—why didn't I think of it before!" she exclaimed.

"But this is an Oriental Ball," I said. It was evident she contemplated appearing at the Hannaman's in the Robin Hood regalia.

"But that's just it!" she cried, "Oriental, so that Mrs. Hannaman and the ignorant others can parade their jewels—an Oriental Ball in my Old English banquet room, beneath the other eight Weythe panels of the life of English Robin of Locksley!" And she pointed to the painting above her fireplace.

"I rescued that one—as a memory

—the others stayed back there to have to look down calmly on Heaven only knows what artistic horrors! Monkey dinners! Midnight bathing suppers featuring plump Mrs. Hugh Hannaman!"

Eyes and hands and tone expressed a mock horror that was both laughable and alarming.

"—Look on, and never able to raise a single honest British quarter staff!" she continued. "And now, this Persian-Arabian-Pan Eastern thing; followed, says the Herald, by a 'surprise' that's known to be the new Italian tenor! French champagne no doubt after that! They only need something Spanish to complete this unpardonable affrontery to a background that fairly shouts for leather breeches and Nottinghamshire folksongs and brown October ale! And they perpetrate it all to make a show of jewels—so that one Peacock can outshine the other Peacocks! It's another Hannaman crime, Jimsey—a crime that cries out to Heaven for a vengeance—a crime against all good manners, all Art."

She was pacing the floor in her excitement; I read in her laughing face and shining eyes the spirit of a hundred reckless, daring outlaws! I looked up at the pictured crew above her mantle, armed and featured for some outrageous jest!

"What do you mean—what do you intend to do!" I cried. I was on my feet also, but in patent consternation.

"I intend to be the 'surprise'!" she thrilled. "We'll beat the tenor to it, and at one fell swoop avenge all the nights of insult to those honest, sober, peaceful, rural Englishmen!"

She came back to me, and stood laughing up at my bewildered face.

"Sit down, Jimsey, and hear your part. It's opera bouffe with music and dancing and a laugh or two I think. For I play *Robin Hood* again tonight! And I've got a splendid role for you—no less than *Little John* which fits your six feet-two amazingly!"

That night, at eight thirty-four, for I looked at the watch on the dashboard, I was again at the wheel of the grey Mercedes, and throwing in my gears as we started crosstown from the Hendrick Arms. It was raining now, a misty drizzle, with a low, damp fog hanging over the city.

"Even the weather is our ally!" cried Billie St. John at my side in the forward seat.

"Their dance must be indoors and in the banquet room. I'd feared they might be planning for the open air. It is the first good omen for a night of triumph!"

But I was far from assured. Beneath a long raincoat and rubbers bought for the purpose that afternoon with the initial breaking of my yellow bill, I wore my evening clothes. She was enveloped in a long, tan motor coat, and had been waiting for me in the lower hallway when I arrived.

What she wore beneath that coat I tried not to think about, or about the

dangers that I was certain we were rushing into to judge from such bits of her plan as she had unfolded.

"It's to be a surprise!" she had repeated at my hint of interrogation, "and it is best that you should be as innocent as the rest of them. I'm sorry—I'm sorry too you can't go in a proper costume, *Little John* in hose and doublet and a huge quarter staff!"

She had sighed elaborately, and her eyes twinkled at my discomforture.

"Alas, that can't be!" she continued, with another sigh for this loss to Art, "You must appear incognito, disguised in your prosaic dress suit, just as your prototype went garbed as a pious friar to the Sheriff's contest for the golden arrow.

"And as that Robin Hood looked out into the crowd, and took new courage from the Lincoln Green he knew to be underneath the monk's drab hood, so I'll be seeing the valiant green of a follower under your staid black and white habiliments . . . And by hook or crook stick close with the dancers, Jimsie—it's your moral support that I need—I'd never have the courage to try it this way, if I did not know you were there!"

Small comfort in such statements made with a mischievous laugh, and a daredevil flash in her eyes! And the final words were only to please my vanity, I feared. She had the courage, and the audacity, for any undertaking quite alone.

I had a definite part, however, that was not so simple as it would seem. It was quite enough to fill me with grim forebodings, and a real alarm, for what it might forerun.

I was going as a supposed newspaper reporter, a freelance writer covering the event for a special story to the London *Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph*. Having tried and failed at writing, I had at least some knowledge as to how to act that role. And in my pocket was a card of admittance such as were sent to the press, and signed by Mrs. Hannaman.

If the dancing had not yet started when we arrived, I was to ask to examine the famous Weythe panels in the ballroom, on the second floor. Then came the first task that alarmed me, that I pictured myself as bungling in a hundred ways. I was to place a key that she had given me in the left-hand lock, inside, of the sliding ballroom doors—which she described as at one end, and the room's only exit. Failing an opportunity to do this unseen, I was to drop the key on the floor by this doorway.

She said: "I have still another expedient—a duplicate key with me, but if possible I wish to avoid using it." and she further declared she had been over the house but a week before, so that it was certain everything would be as she expected them!

I was to remain then in the ballroom till the "bitter end"—the expression was her's.

With this came another instruction that invoked no reassuring preconception of events.

"There is a button in the wall," she

said, "just at the left of these same entrance doorways. Manage to stay near this, and if the worst should happen—if I need your help—your shoulder can accidentally lean against this button, and the room will blacken! Meantime, no one else's shoulder will move it, by accident or by intention!"

Finally, I would return alone by train that left the Larchmont station at 1:03 A.M. She affirmed that her 'bitter end' would be in ample time for this departure. For the Mercedes she had her own uses, as will be seen; and when I reached town I would come to the Hendrick Arms, where (please Heaven!) she would be waiting. The servants would be gone; I should ring three times—her door opened with a button which she snapped from the window or the fireplace.

Strange instructions! But I had taken them on and was in for it—now at the racer's wheel—for better or for worse!

Silence soon enveloped us. Crossing the Harlem River I had turned with some trivial remark; I wanted conversation to keep up my fast oozing confidence. She was, or pretended to be, asleep. She had the faculty of throwing off every care, of complete relaxation to prepare herself for any unusual task.

Not so with me, and between my misgivings and the black, slippery road and the fog, I had anything but a pleasant hour.

She was alert however, when, at nine-thirty by the instrument board watch, we were swinging through New Rochelle.

"We turn at the next square—those corner arc lamps," she directed. "Sherwood is just beyond the town, on the Shore Road."

And presently we came in sight of colored lights, twinkling from the wooded gloom of its grounds; a hazy glow of arches showing the path of the entrance driveway.

Beyond this, through the fog and drizzle, was the lighted blur of the house itself, the mist seeming to magnify its ample extent and its three storied height as indicated by a long, triple line of window blaze.

The whole building seemed *en fête*, and my spirits sank still lower at the thought of venturing under false colors into this pitiless furnace of illumination.

There were several cars turning through the driveway, but at her instruction I passed on, and having covered the quarter mile of lawn and shrubbery that separated it from the neighboring place, Billie St. John took the wheel herself.

With all lights extinguished, we turned off a branching way and proceeded by a blind, circuitous route of many turnings, but which she seemed to know perfectly, till we were at last in a narrow, deserted road, our motor barely crawling through the inky gloom.

"We're back at the north rear border of the estate!" she whispered,

and I could distinguish a high wall at one side. Then the machine lurched gently; we pushed up out of the path and into a tree hidden space at its upper side. The wet leaves of overhanging trees brushed my face as we came to a dead stop.

"We leave the Mercedes here—at the stage-door," she laughed in a low, excited voice, and having locked the brakes, was climbing out. "There's a gateway in the wall just opposite—hurry—you've got to tramp straight along the wall-path to the main roadway and the front entrance drive—*you* enter past the "box-office"—you must not be late—!"

"But is it safe to leave the car—!" My heart was cold at this separation; I was fearful of a dozen mishaps—

"Not one chance in a hundred of its being found—Look—you can't see ten yards away! Now—it's quite invisible!" For by that time we were back in the road, and I had followed her to the narrow, high gate to which she was fitting a key.

"But if I bungle somehow!" I cried, desperate. It was one thing to go with her into physical danger; it was quite another to have her safety perhaps depend on my untrained dissimulation—my uncertain knowledge of her plan.

"You'll not fail me—you're not the kind that fails in a sporting crisis—"

She pressed my hand with a sudden assuring grip. "Follow the wall path—then strike hard for our East Side kiddies and our partnership!" she whispered and was gone.

As an automaton I moved through the next quarter of an hour. I did make sure that the machine was ready for an instant starting; then, steeled to a kind of steadiness by the touch of her hand, I skirted the wall to the main thoroughfare—to the lighted driveway.

I found myself presenting my press card to a footman, and my overcoat and rubbers disposed of in an anteroom, I blinked onto an assemblage that might have stepped from the pages of *The Thousand and One Nights*, with its Sultans and Scheherazades, its Grand Viziers and Slave Girls, its Beggars and Merchants and Princesses of every Eastern mode. Clashing color everywhere in costume, in flowers, in decoration; and everywhere a glitter of jewels—in head bands and collar and corsage.

The Hannamans were wallowing in their element.

I was a marked man in my sober black, and there presently bore down upon me a ponderous Persian Empress, arrayed as Solomon in all his glory never was; her neck and shoulders hung with pearls, her arms and fingers encrusted, about her ample throat a necklace of at least a hundred perfectly matched diamonds.

There was no mistaking Mrs. Hugo Hannaman as she greeted me effusively.

For the rain that had been kind to us, had barbarously upset the apple cart of that lady. I was the only jour-

nalist on the scene! Heaven and earth were mine for the asking! And I breathed a little easier at the prospect of being able to carry out at least my part of the adventure without a hitch.

I spare you most of the conversation of the next hour, for since it, I have had an infinite sympathy with those public scribes whose duty is to report the doings of the social climber. And the 'absent treatment' of the event by the New York reporters was explained. They had doubtless experienced Mrs. Hannaman before. It is possible to break off a telephonic interview by a simple hanging up of the receiver. The blame goes to a long suffering service.

All the papers had so telephoned, I was told; and such notables as had arrived were avidly pointed out to me, and a printed list of invited guests forced into my hands. Driven indoors by the weather, most of them not gathered at the punch bowl, had commenced informal dancing through the smaller lower rooms, to the music of a flower hidden orchestra in the hallway.

The ballroom events awaited the arrival of the Duke, who, it seems, had escaped to the neighboring Yacht Club earlier in the evening, and was being hurriedly searched for.

Meantime Mrs. Hannaman, learning that I was a newcomer in repertorial circles, grew eloquent with descriptions of former social triumphs, and outlined a plan by which she now proposed descending on London in the Fall, where they had rented a famous town house.

"And we women of society have our duties as well as our enjoyments!" she exclaimed, when this latter subject was exhausted. Another printed list, produced like a conjurer's white rabbit, gave the charities of whose boards she was a member, and she noted in pencil the amounts of her larger subscriptions.

Photographs also were to be supplied to me before I left; she was especially anxious that I have one in her present costume and wearing the new jewels she was showing for the first time.

The news being brought that the Duke was discovered and on his way, I managed to break in with a request to see the Weythes. And a telephone call from another paper released me from Mrs. Hannaman, and delivered me into the hands of the head of the household who now appeared, and was detailed to be my guide about the whole establishment.

Like myself, Mr. Hugo Hannaman's ample bulk was encased in modern clothes, a huge yellow turban his only contribution to the Oriental scheme of dress.

'Sherwood' was a wonderful rambling structure on an English country model, the like of which is probably no where else in America, but Mr. Hannaman had other ideas of grandeur.

"Just a simple place!" he apologized with a depreciating wave of a

fat, pink hand. "I took it over as a sort of charity to a business associate some years ago. It wasn't designed or built by me.

"Follow us next year, and we'll have something really bang up to show you down at Newport! Mrs. Hannaman's spending next month there you know with the Olsotts. And for our own place, I've given my builders carte blanche to go ahead full steam—my wife's position as a social leader demands the most expensive the market can provide and we'll have it all there, from door knobs to oil paintings!"

He was a gross, sleek brute, that peculiar contradiction of softness and broad shouldered ruggedness that the city sometimes achieves. In feature heavy jowled; a short, clipped, blond moustasche over a loose mouth, small piercing eyes, retreating brow. A self-made success of the awful type devoted to a worshipful praise of its maker.

He combined a sneer for others of lesser 'talents' with a belief that there was nothing in the world money could not purchase. He began our acquaintance with the taking out of a long pocketbook and the selecting and placing of a fifty dollar bill loose in its fold.

"We'd like an A-1 'write-up', and I reckon the newspaper game doesn't pay any too large remuneration!" he said with odious significance.

The Weythe panels he dismissed with a shrug, and divulged other charming and characteristic opinions.

"American stuff—not up to much!" he scoffed. "But it's a fine idea to have a set of paintings as part of the wall around a room—gives it class. For Newport we're having some made up by a Frenchman—'Court of Love' and 'Sea Nymphs Bathing' stuff—something really classic, and good to look at at the same time—what?" and he gave me an ingratiating dig in the ribs.

"Take it from me, the French have the right idea about Art! Nifty country—nifty town, Paris—you've been there I suppose if you're for these London papers. Greatest place in the world for a clever spender, just as New York is the place when you're out for the wampum! Take me for example!"

To hear his version of his business career in America and his spending career abroad was painful, but as he paced the floor in preoccupied enthusiasm, it was child's play to insert Billie St. John's key in the lock of the folding doors—the great room's only exit.

I should add that the room was of some hundred feet in length, like the model of an old-time banquet hall. It was cleared for dancing, an orchestra platform at the far end. The walls were wainscoted to the height of about eight feet, this topped by a ledge on which were plate and steins. Above this, several high, small-paned windows looked out on one side—the other wall and the two ends pictured solidly in amazingly lifelike groups, various ad-

ventures of England's ballad hero.

An empty space above the doorway in which now hung some Eastern drapery was where the panel at the Hendrick Arms properly belonged.

Well, so far things had moved smoothly and, the mission of the key accomplished, my courage mounted.

And the color, the music, the spirit of gaiety which even the Hannaman's boredom could not destroy—the glass of excellent champagne which was the prelude to our tour of inspection—all culminated to a restoration of self possession, and a certain reckless indifference.

My first task was accomplished without a slip. And Billie St. John could not fail in whatever was to follow!

But just before leaving the ballroom, or rather, before the coming of the musicians quickly followed by the gay crowd interrupted us, we touched on a subject that brought a disquieting disclosure.

From a discussion of the fee charged by the Metropolitan tenor—this as the sole criterion of the merit of the much advertised 'surprise' of the evening—Hannaman succulently progressed to a money valuation of his wife's jewels, and the fortune in trinkets then gathered under Sherwood's roof.

He asserted: "Three hundred thousand wouldn't pay for what Mrs. Hannaman wears tonight! Did you notice her necklace? First time she's worn it. Alone it's worth a cool hundred and fifty thousand! I reckon she's got all the others licked a mile. Even the emeralds on the Morehouse sisters and the diamonds of old Wetmore's widow look a bad second! And we've got a few more flashes up our sleeves.

"When you consider there's not a woman here wearing less than fifty or sixty thousand, it's some beat, my boy—some prosperity display! Shows the class in which *we* travel—What?"

"But isn't it hazardous, out here in the country, and no protection?" I interjected an obvious question. "Suppose some servant should be a burgler!"

His sleek face glowed, and he licked his lips.

"Let any of 'em try it!" he said meaningly. "Some folk go in for detectives disguised as guests and waiters—poor stuff, for half the detectives are more crooked than the crooks themselves. I trust no one but myself—motto in business, motto in private life. Look at this, and imagine what will happen if I catch anyone starting anything at *my* parties!"

He had pulled out a heavy forty-four from his hip pocket, and returned it as quickly at the sound of the approaching merriment.

"I may not be much on dancing and entertaining," he said, "leave that to the cleverness of Mrs. Hannaman; but I'm right here with the check book for the bills, and a little old protector to see that the servants behave!"

What Billie St. John contemplated

'starting' I did not know, but my heart sank again into my pumps at this disclosure.

I had no idea where she was; I could get no warning word to her. I could only make it my business to keep close to Hugo Hannaman; and I inspected again the position of the little white tipped push button on the wall by the doorway, which she said controlled the lights that blazed from the central candelabrum and a number of lesser clusters about the wall.

Led by Mrs. Hannaman and the recovered Royalty, now slightly the worse for drink and dressed as an Arab chieftain, the formal dancing party began. I steered my host back to the doorway where we stood together as the orchestra crashed into a popular jazz.

But my host was presently called away by a whispered message from a footman, and I lived on the torture rack the fifteen minutes till he returned. My deep breath of relief passed unnoticed as he communicated to me that the interruption was just the arrival of the Italian tenor, the 'surprise' of the evening; for Hannaman himself was in a righteous sweat of indignation.

"The greaser insisted on supper—nothing about supper in the contract!" growled my outraged host. "I should think two thousand a night was enough without grub thrown in!"

I fear that I have little remorse for the events that were about to terminate the American social rise of Hugo Hannaman.

It was half an hour later, when the room was full of dancers and dowagers—all having been herded up from below to hear the great tenor scheduled to appear as the next "number"—that the sudden breaking off of the music in the very middle of a crashing, lilting bar, halted the whirling couples!

And the buzz of inquiry as to its meaning, and the exclamations of loud protest died in an ominous silence, as all eyes were mysteriously drawn to that portion of the wall just above the orchestra, where a startling, masked apparation in Lincoln green had suddenly stepped, or seemed to step, directly from the scene on the painted woodland panel!

For perhaps a full ten seconds it stood quite silent on the small steinledge—a figure in buckskin and hose identical with the central outlaw personage of the painting.

The shapely, green-tighted legs were astride; the gauntleted hands on the hips of a leather doublet. Higher up were sleeves of green slashed with scarlet; and then a green, overlapping neckpiece—its scalloped edges showing flat and sharp against the dull buff of the jacket. There was a green cap also of soft irregular outline, and a long slender feather of brightest red, that topped jauntily a head of short blond curls.

The face covering only was not in keeping with the period, for the scar-

let half-mask with its skin smooth forehead, its narrow eye slits, its piquant upturned nose was decidedly French or Italian. A handkerchief of the same scarlet was tied loosely to hide the mouth and chin.

"By Jove! Rippingly splendid!"

It was the drawl of the English Duke that broke the spell and the silence, but before his admiration could be echoed by all save the Hannamans and myself—*they* open mouthed with amazement—*I* gripped by an unreasonable terror—another variance also from the strictly period equipment of this Robin Hood became suddenly evident, the sight of which brought a scream from more than one jewel-draped feminine throat.

The hands, I have already said, were gloved; and as they now left the hips and turned toward the onlookers below, in each leather sheathed fist was a very modern firearm of the latest model; short, vicious, their dull barrels faintly reflecting the glitter from the lights, their blunted ends slowly and menacingly sweeping over that whole astonished company.

It was the earlier sight of these, the orchestra leader afterwards explained, that had brought his music to such a sudden stoppage!

The figure cried: "All hands up! Slowly! I mean no harm unless someone tries to leave this room! Such a move will bring instant death!"

The voice rang out sharp and commanding—with no trace of the woman in the tones except perhaps a kind of caustic smoothness. And this very smoothness made its threat more deadly.

In the questioning, agitated murmur all hands were raised, mine among the rest. Whether a joke—a part of the show—a visitation of the spirit of the great Outlaw himself—or something worse—no one in that astonished moment had time or wit to solve.

My eyes tore from the green and scarlet form to the face of Hugo Hannaman who stood quite near me. I can see now his absurd appearance—the yellow turban pushed back on his head, on his face a silly grin; while his startled eyes were wildly searching for those of his wife. Was this something of her arranging—or—!

I recalled that Hannaman also had a gun.

The Robin Hood voice now ordered in a sharper staccato, "You footman! By the door! Close it! Lock it!" and at the same moment Hannaman found his wife's eyes as did I, protruding beads from a face gone pasty white.

Hannaman said: "By God—what is this nonsense!" And he started forward lowering his hands.

But he did not advance even a single step. He halted one foot in mid air as there issued a spit of fire from one black pistol mouth, and the turban was carried from his forehead. A vase crashed in the outside hallway beyond, where the bullet struck.

"Hands up—and keep them up—and silence, Hugo Hannaman!" so

spoke the voice from the stein-ledge. "I know your breed and your deserts, and if you make another move I'll shoot you like a dog. One of my guns will never leave your forehead."

There was no question now; the man's face went greyer than his wife's. But he did not lick his lips, they only trembled. And his hands shook as he raised them! A coward too! A gun in his own pocket, and he dared not shoot it out.

"A holdup de luxe—crack shot—and silencers on the guns!" said a man's low voice next to me. "Madman or crook, it looks serious—if someone could get through that door—you are the nearest—"

You may be sure I made no move; instead I put back a foot if he should himself try for it. But the figure on the ledge was bent on blocking any such attempt.

"Shut the door, I said, and keep well inside!" it ordered. And a frightened servant, hastened by another spit of fire that planted a bullet in the wall above his head, pulled-to first one sliding oaken barrier and then the other.

"Now lock them!"

I saw the key that I had placed there cut off escape and interference. The room was sealed.

"Bring the key here. Take down the stein near my right foot—put the key in it and replace the stein."

These orders were carried out in a silence that could be cut, for the pistols were sweeping back and forth with an awe inspiring steadiness.

"All ladies to the right side—all men to the left! No one will be harmed if you obey—but if you do not—!"

A murmur of protest, a wavering of the lifted hands died at this new threat. Two shots, that just missed finger tips and shattered light bulbs in the rear, enforced it. And I took note that one of the guns was constantly trained on Hugo Hannaman.

The hitting of golf balls was apparently not the only projectional skill of Miss Billie St. John!

We stood humiliated, some sixty or so on a side; two close-packed groups that would have been ludicrous but for the threat of those death hurtling pistol mouths. I was still back near the wall, and I realized that the men had been kept to the side of the light button. I moved in front of it and stood, taut and waiting, cold chills creeping up and down my spine.

"The ladies only may now lower their hands—they're going to have to use them, and I regret keeping them up so long! A lone bandit with odds of a hundred to one can take few chances!"

A lone bandit! So that was it! And there was an audible sigh of relief. They were at least not dealing with a madman! And with the lowering of female arms, the woman's group revived; one or two even managed to laugh a little wildly.

Only Mrs. Hannaman looked on the point of fainting, her face now sickly yellow. She had aged years in the last

few moments. At the front of the men stood Hannaman, his soft, fat neck purple above his collar, his raised hands working in nervous contraction.

"A regular highway robbery, by Jove! I think it's topping!"

It was the Englishman again; we were neighbors now in the movement of the grouping. But with my admiration; my pride—may I admit—for Billie St. John, I was also sick at heart with fear. Whatever this mad prank was to be, the risk was terrible! I wondered if any other of the men but Hannaman was armed. I looked about, and tensed myself to spring forward and smother any such attack, regardless of its consequence to me.

Billie St. John was speaking in the mannish voice: "Our hosts, the Hannamans, have promised a surprise. I am it. It is their purpose tonight, through my humble conception of a bandit of a happier day, to eliminate certain competition in the matter of jewels. It will prove an interesting exhibit to our distinguished English guest—an object lesson in that Hannaman efficiency about which we all have read in the stock-market advertisements. Our host long ago discovered that the shortest road to preeminence in business was to plunder—friend and foe alike! In this social matter then, why not be a pioneer in the same effective method?"

The words came with a lilt, but they were at the same time scathing, biting; and the moment's pause brought an audible gasp from the room. No ordinary robbery, this! And eyes left for a second the amazing figure on the stein ledge to seek the faces of their host and hostess.

Incredible as it sounded, could the speech be true! Mrs. Hannaman turned a degree yellower, and clutched at her diamonds with fat, shaking hands. Her husband was sputtering, between fear and rage beyond the power of words. And a shot "from the hip" as it were of the stein-ledge figure, that must have almost grazed his shaking fingers, halted any speech attempt.

The mocking voice from the crimson mask continued: "I will be brief. I regret that with this costume there is not time for a more romantic courtesy. The ladies will step forward one by one, and place in the stein on the platform a contribution of the envied ornaments. Don't tremble—your loss will be but a sentimental one. You are simply deprived of the possession of a selected jewel. After the ceremony, when I am happily gone, Mr. Hannaman will write you each his check to cover the full monetary value of your loss. His wife, therefore, will be able to proceed through the season, or at least through next month's gatherings, her supremacy unchallenged. . . . The orchestra will play again, merrily, as befits this jovial hour of triumph. Wasn't it the 'Dallas Blues' I interrupted? Most appropriate. A somber title but a merry melody! We will have the 'Dallas Blues'.

So that was the amazingly simple plan! And Hugo Hannaman at long last found some courage and his voice.

"Enough of this nonsense!" he cried, and was reaching for his hip pocket, but a spit of fire that grazed his forearm with its bullet ended his protest. His hands were slowly raised again and they were empty.

"The next time I will shoot to kill, Mister Hugo Hannaman!" came from the figure on the stein-shelf. "I have had information that you are sometimes armed like myself. Many of *your* deals require physical protection. Hand over the gun that you were reaching for. Come forward and put it on this ledge."

Two more shots from the ledge enforced this command. Hugo Hannaman could only obey. The voice from the Robin Hood costume continued: "Another favorite method of our host is to be traitor to his catspaws—he is trying now to make it appear that I am here without his knowledge. I do not trust him. It seems best that I alone am armed."

"By gad! I'd not put it past the beggar!" muttered the Englishman, now quite sobered and enjoying the proceedings hugely. There were other contorted faces that expressed a like suspicion.

"And now—back to business!" said the voice from behind the mask of the platformed figure. "The lady in red. I'll trouble you first for your emeralds."

It took another bullet in the wall above the women to start the line; and a threatening downward swing of the other gun to arouse the huddled musicians; but with this extra urge the amazing procedure commenced.

To the somewhat shakily rendered 'Dallas Blues' the frightened women passed below, and tore off whatever bauble was demanded. A ring, a necklace, a broach, a pendant; both ear ornaments of diamonds and rubies and a ring from one matron who started to protest, and had the honor of a bullet at her feet to bring her around.

In a matter of fifteen minutes the last gay masquerader had paid tribute; the total heaped the tall stein to its brim.

Twice also, Hannaman had started forward as if to speak, and twice a warning spit of fire showed that his movements were under constant scrutiny.

Mrs. Hannaman alone now remained to be plucked.

The masked voice was speaking: "We come to the second clever factor of our scheme. These jewels—or their proceeds—are to be contributed in the name of our hostess to the various funds that purchase ice and milk for the children of the city's poor. Withhold your applause for the well known Hannaman generosity; he is the man behind the ice and milk combines, so that all this money will eventually return to him! And Mrs. Hannaman still supreme in the matter of jewelry! A scheme somewhat

involved, but clever, if you think it over. You all can think it over after I am gone."

Hannaman's purple face was near to bursting now. Another gasp and mutter, also laughter from several of the men.

The voice continued: "And finally —*silent you!*"—this last and another pistol shot in the direction of Hannaman who was trying hard to speak—

"And finally," was repeated, "Our hostess, Mrs. Hannaman, tosses in her brand new necklace. You orchestra leader, stop playing and hand it up to me—reach it over the barrel of my gun."

The figure crouched and lowered one pistol arm. Its muzzle was straight on the gasping woman, and she undid her diamonds letting them drop to the floor from palsied fingers. At another "Action! Action!" the music man picked up the treasure, and from his platform swung it over the steel pistol barrel. With a sharp movement the flashing string was thrown back over the guantleted forearm of the Robin Hood.

"I'll have the stein now, please. Place it carefully on the ledge between my boots."

This last also to the orchestra leader, who could but obey with a black muzzle three feet from his eyes.

"That's all. But to confess, I'll return this necklace—its taking is only for appearances! Our hostess pretends she also must contribute to the loot. And I give you this secret information to hold above their heads in case they try to welsh about the jewel checks. *This necklace was smuggled in.* Bought two years ago in Paris—never declared—no duty paid—just daring to wear it now. Any proper government official will be interested."

Another gasp from the audience below; Hugo Hannaman's clutching hands sagged a little lower toward his shoulders; his neck swelled—

"It's a damned lie!" he screamed at last, but the sickening dropping of the woman's jaw was proof enough.

The green and scarlet figure had crouched again, one pistol hand resting just above the stein.

"I'll ask you all to face about—*instantly!*"

It was the final command, the final threatening sweep of the guns. I alone hesitated to see that hand above the stein grasp the handle and straighten up; and also to see Hugo Hannaman whirl back, whip hand to hip—the left hip—the flash of nickle against his coat-tails, his body stiffen.

Good Lord! The man had two revolvers! If I had known that! If Billie St. John had known it!

But I was too quick for him. Not at his back—Heaven somehow directed my brain and steadied my nerves—but at the light button that for ten minutes had been against the side of my forearm, I jabbed with all my strength. His hand just started upward; I saw, or thought I saw, the

high wall panel behind Billie St. John swing backward, there was a derisive, taunting ring of laughter from the red mask—then blackness snuffed the room—and pandemonium!

Someone finally struck a match. Hannaman, in the middle of the hall, was whirling his revolver in frantic arcs. Above the women's screams he had been bawling curses and crying for the lights. His veneer of gentility gone, he had reverted clean to type and was reviling God and man, his wife, the servants and musicians, with a string of unhallowed epitaphs.

It was the unhappy footmen who at last discovered the fatal button, and with the electric flood a semblance of order was restored. Mrs. Hannaman had fainted clear away, and was stretched at the foot of the musicians' platform. Most of the men were searching out their women in a battle of denunciation and distress.

"What damn fool switched the lights!" shouted Hannaman for the eighth time, intermingled with more rabid words. "I'd had the scoundrel in another second!"

I was safe enough in silence, but the Englishman made me doubly safe.

"By Jove, I think I hit it when I turned—I heard the click—and jolly glad I am too, if it helped the laddie get away! Jove—I've never seen such ripping pluck!"

Thus this candid reprobate; no one could accuse *him* of collusion!

And the discovery that Hannaman had been doubly armed all evening—he was apparently the only one who had a weapon—brought further looks and accusing words that all his now vain crashing with a chair at the now solid wall panel could not still. Up there, paint flaked off to a metal back; a hollow echo and two seams; revealed the mystery of our visitor's appearance.

By the time doors at the hallway were pried open with a music stand and a crowbar that the uproar had brought to aid from the outside (the key was safely in my pocket), a full ten minutes had elapsed.

A rushing through the house, a hasty exploration of the pitch black grounds surrounding it (the outside lights wires had been entirely cut) brought no discovery.

There was a single trail. In a small dressing room off a suite at the far end of the secnnd floor, the Italian tenor was securely bound and gagged with pieces of the table cloth. An untouched supper was spread before him. His language when released was even more lurid than our host's, and we made out that he had been tied up at pistol point some half hour earlier by our red-masked apparition of the ballroom.

Meantime Hugo Hannaman had recovered a saner poise. And to a company assembled in the billiard hall on the first floor, he pleaded by threat, by promise, by prayers, by any earthly thing that the power of

money could secure, that the night's disaster be kept from the papers and from the police.

Just who did, and who did not, take checks for jewel losses and for silence I do not know. He wrote out quite enough of them and promised more to others. The musicians, the servants—I think—he undertook to set up for the balance of their lives! I, as the only writer present, could have anything this side of Paradise.

I afterwards wondered if my refusal of reward was too ready; my promise to supress any report too easily given.

His wife, recovered now, appeared to add her pleading. For her I felt a little wave of pity. She knew, and he knew, that their social climb was at an end; that half those there believed at least some partial collusion to rest with them. And then—the smuggled necklace—

One of the men had stayed back in the ball-room to attempt the forcing of the wall panel. He came down just at the end, this smuggled necklace in his hand! He'd found it lying on the floor close by the platform. The phantom Robin Hood had kept his word! Another incriminating smirch, and the Hannamans took it with a dogwhipped stare.

As motor cars at last bore away excited guests, I stole off to the station just in time to board that final New York train.

New York is a city of perpetual life. So when I finally reached Grand Central after what seemed a journey of endless stoppings, I plunged into a subway almost as heated and almost as confusedly full as if it were noonday.

The blessed crowd! On the half deserted train every other passenger had seemed to eye me with suspicion. The conductor had seemed over long in taking my ticket. The brakeman had seemed to be watching me from the end of the car. And there were still terrifying thoughts of Billie St. John; I imagined every conceivable tragedy as overtaking her. A collision, a broken car, some chance discovery of that amazing loot before she could return it. Surely she did not intend to carry out her mad announcement of its disposal!

So the contact with the laughter and the silences, the blessed concentration of the dweller in Manhattan on his own affairs, restored my poise. Nothing could be wrong. Her Mercedes was as dependable as a battle cruiser. And after what I had just witnessed of steady nerves and matchless courage, it was absurd to think she could not move safely past any crisis!

Nevertheless, after a pause to be sure I was not being shadowed, I made the short block from the Hundred and Tenth Street station at a run. I turned the corner and gazed up. There, twelve stories above, were the lights in her windows and the windows of her tower!

She had left word; I was taken up without question; and her door was

opened almost instantly at my triple ring. My heart was beating double quick. From the front room came the subdued notes of the record player, playing, of all tunes, that plaintively jerky melody which the Hannaman orchestra had performed for the amazing interlude of two hours before. I strode through the doorway, my raincoat still on, my hat in eager hands.

Her tan motor coat lay across a chair.

"Thank God!" I started to cry, as the huddled figure in the shadow of a window seat straightened forward and arose. But the words froze on my lips. I leaped back with a questioning oath!

The figure was that of a man, and it took a couple of steps toward me; the hands thrust deep in the side pockets of the coat; the rays from the teakwood lamp falling on a row of brass buttons; on the outside of a shield badge; on the shield above the visor of the cap which only partly shaded a face vaguely familiar with its grey lines, its piercing eyes squinting through half-closed lids beneath the bushy eyebrows.

I recognized the supposed district messenger of the morning—a police officer now—who thrust forward a pugnacious face!

Sneered a nasal, rasping voice: "Stop where you are! Been waitin' for you—Mr. Mercedes Chauffueur—Mr. Little John! You had your warning about the lady of this apartment. I guess now you'll go with me to a quiet little cell."

But I had survived too much that night to care for the threat of a mere policeman—a smallish one at that! I glanced again at the motor coat across the chair.

"What are you doing here, and where is Miss St. John!" I thundered. "I don't care who you are, or what they do to me, but if any harm has come to her I'll throw you headlong from those windows!"

And just in time to halt my rush, a silvery laugh rang out, and my messenger-policeman underwent a sudden change. One hand jerked off the cap and wig; is its place was a tumbled cloud of soft brown curls. Half hidden eyes opened wide; the tense, thin mouth rounded out to a proper fulness.

"You—you!" I gasped, and stood dumbfounded.

The eyebrow had followed the cap and wig, and Billie St. John mopped a handkerchief across her face to a partial restoration of the color and lines of her lovely features.

"Forgive me, Jimsie!" she said, "though I'm not at all penitent about doing it. You see, I intended declaring myself at your rooms this morning, but I lost my courage. That was very bad, and I had to make good somehow! And your face and words just now were wonderful—quite as wonderful as that dousing of the lights at Sherwood! I'm glad I found you."

"But why in God's name this, and why did you come at all!"

"I wanted to again make you realize the danger of my partnership proposal—you know its danger now, Jimsey. I was afraid that you had consented last night because of an empty pocket, or because you thought you were in love with me—"

"But you could have sent that warning by a real messenger—"

"Of course. But there was another reason. I wanted to test my disguise. I was afraid I was a bit rusty in impersonations, and this morning early I had a different plan than the one we sprung tonight. I had not yet thought of the safely masked Robin Hood idea! That came to me here in this room with you, and with it the possibilities of the secret passage in the walls of Sherwood—a passage from the back of the revolving panel to what used to be my rooms. You see, in those younger days when it was built, I was incurably romantic—an amateur knight errant—the house has several features that the Hannamans do not know about!"

"You're not exactly an amateur in disguise!"

"Oh, you must not mind, for I studied a year at the *Comedie Française*, and then had a special course in voice and make-up with Jules Belsarte—make-up for broad daylight and real life! He is a part of the French Secret Service, and knows more of such things than anyone else in the world."

"But why should you—"

She broke in with a wistful, eager tone.

"I told you I'd always wanted to be a man! Men can go anywhere, do anything; and I am greedy for all that life can give. Do you think if they had guessed me a woman I could have cowed and bluffed and held that room of men tonight!"

She threw back her head and laughed then at the memory, but I somehow could not join.

She continued: "Another face—other eyes—another voice—presto! I can have a man's share of the world! I can snap my fingers at Nature—euchre Destiny! And then—if sometime the worst comes to the worst—it need not be Miss Billie St. John that is trapped—"

"But you must stop!" I cried, "I can't endure the thought of your chancing these risks! If it's for others; then no convict's freedom, no child's life is worth one scratching of your finger—"

She broke into my words with a laugh.

"Don't give me due for what I cannot deserve," she said. "It was not entirely for others, as you put it, that I played the game tonight, or last night—or that we will go on playing to the end, Jimsie my partner. It's firstly, always, for a binding promise that I've made myself—for a reason that I have to be alive—not be just a useless ornament in a world where many injustices should be corrected."

Silence, then she added:

"That smuggled necklace—its diamonds disposed of separately—I

don't think the Hannamans will take steps to trace it—can send hundreds of my slum children to country vacations—and there is a mortgage on the Settlement House—"

"But you left that necklace behind!" I cried. "They found it by the orchestra platform!"

"And gave it back to Mrs. Hannaman?"

"She has it now!" I said.

Billie St. John took the other hand from her pocket, and there was a gleam of jewels between her fingers as she held to the light a string of quite a hundred perfect diamonds that could be none other than the necklace I saw drop from the fat neck of our late hostess!

She met my astonishment with laughing eyes.

"I'd almost really send it back to see their faces, when they someday show the one they now have an expert—"

"You mean—!" I cried, the truth dawning to my mind as I gazed at the sparkling, living fire that hung about her fingers.

"They have a perfect imitation, Jimsey, that I left to someday take another fall out of their wretched boasting. My original plan about them was simply that—the reason for an expedition to Sherwood some weeks ago. You'll laugh to know I was a French maid who answered an advertisement for extra help over a week-end they were entertaining a house full of guests. My hair was cut short and dyed. There were some other changes in my appearance. I found out about the proposed 'Oriental Ball'. I decided to wait. I'm glad I did wait and that I did not exchange the necklaces then."

"But won't you be suspected? Who else could know about the secret passage?"

"The architects—the builders—a hundred workmen—the artist of those wall paintings. No one will suffer even if they guess; perhaps I'd like to have them guess—"

And into her eyes came that strange, hard look that was so foreign to her customary self. Her lips locked—and her jaw a straight white line. It passed, she shrugged her shoulders, then smiled at me again.

"I might even send our Government the proper duty charge—in their name of course—regretting it had not been properly paid at the time of the necklace smuggled entry. *That* would be something!"

And she laughed merrily.

"But those other jewels—" I cried.

She had turned and thrown the motor coat about her shoulders, and was at the foot of her tower stairs before she answered me.

"I have a connection in Paris, Jimsie, that will turn them into glittering, expendible cash. Cash for my Settlement House. Cash for you and I. But now I'm going up to dress. Forget the "other jewels" and my serious moods—smoke a cigar and contemplate the happy fact that as my fifty-fifty partner you are worth at least fifty thousand! There's a

supper waiting for us in the other room where I want to hear about the commotion when I left, and about the Italian tenor. I had the devil's own time to convince him! He hadn't had his supper, and seemed to think I was some deep laid plan of Hugo Hannaman's to scare him from it!"

She was gone in hasty flight up the stairway.

I lit my cigar and went to the window. The sky had cleared. The same stars of the night before were now shining down. I could hear a motor car whizzing by on The Drive below, and lights were gleaming here and there on the Jersey shore, and from the broad dark back of the inky river. Then the noise of a freight train on the New York Central tracks—a cloud of sparks—the smell of smoke—

This *was* New York—not Bagdad! It was all inconceivable, but it had happened! And I tried to put the twos and twos together to solve the riddle of the night, and of this girl-woman whom I loved.

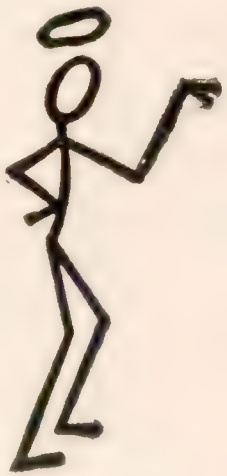
What was she—rich Samaritan or unscrupulous adventuress—Justice incarnate or the veritable Prince of all burglars past and present, from the Forty Thieves of mythical Ali Baba to the much storied Arsene Lupin and Raffles!

The night and the river brought no answer, and I turned again at her footstep on the tower stairs. Incredibly soon for her altered attire, she was slowly descending their black, winding way.

She wore a low, white dress of soft, clinging stuff. Over it glistened a repetition of some tiny silver ornament. About the high waist was a ribbon of pale green. Across the front of her soft, dark hair, now done tightly about her head, was a banded coronet of green and silver.

There were no jewels except the platinum wrist watch. I had noticed that she never wore them.

And looking at her then, I did not care what lawless thing she might be or do. Such radiant loveliness could be a law unto itself! That hour, at least, I was content to serve and worship blindly.



# WHAT'S NEW IN CRIME

**by HANS STEFAN SANTESSON**

The effectiveness of the prize-winning combination of Poul Anderson, the writer, and of Trygve Yamamura—judo expert, Samurai sword connoisseur and private detective—first seen in Anderson's PERISH BY THE SWORD, has already been commented upon in this column. Add to this the possibilities of a treatise on witchcraft and magic which Caesare Borgia might have studied some lonely evening, and you get, in Anderson's MURDER IN BLACK LETTER (Macmillan, $3.50), still another first-rate detective novel which, in addition to disposing of a killer, also gets across the fact that Niccolo Machiavelli was far more than an apologist for the *realpolitik* of his times. It is of course so much simpler to dismiss him as this—the way we succumb to the tendency to accept *clichés* applicable to still other personalities. Robert Kintyre, Renaissance scholar and a specialist on Machiavelli and his times, is a likeable hero. This, in itself, is—as we all know—unusual. . . . Recommended.

The world is going to be a considerably duller place if—one of these years—Seldon Truss decides to kill off Mr. Horace.

Mr. Horace, crime reporter for the Daily Snapshot, who pops up again in Truss' ONE MAN'S ENEMIES (Doubleday, $2.95), may not be an advertisement for some of the more solid British virtues, but he is an explanation of the reason why British journalism—at least *some* sections of the profession—could give pointers to our own tabloids. Mr. Horace has a reputation for going where "angels fear to tread", and

he does so even here when the corpse —the first of a series, I hasten to add—turns out to be his long-lost uncle. Do read this.

By way of contrast (how many times *have* I said this by now?) Ludovic Travers would appear to be the personification of all that is urbane, and rather conservative-minded, in England's upper middle-classes. Travers has the very British (and also Hollywood) gift for finding himself in the most improbable situations and generally coming out of these, immaculate in manner if not in appearance. This is of course the fabled strength of Yesterday's Empire, irreverently summed up in that "classic" saw about "Mad dogs and Englishmen. . . .", which could also be interpreted as tribute to a way of behavior it is fashionable to ignore *does* have considerable virtue. . . . Christopher Bush's latest novel, THE CASE OF THE CARELESS THIEF (Macmillan, $2.95) sends Travers down to Sandbeach, the Blackpool of the South Coast, on what at first seems a simple enough case, in the course of which Travers discovers, once more, some of the reasons why men commit murder. Do read this.

Inspector Maigret has, of course, become an almost international symbol for an approach to criminal investigation singularly lacking in the glitter and heroics of more dramatic investigators. This is police procedure in an investigation carried to the 'nth degree, taking full cognizance of the human elements involved, with less flamboyance and less pyrotechnics than we've grown accustomed to in recent years. This is a return to what—for want of a better term—we may describe as the European approach to a crime, where the detective relies more on his own abilities and less on accessible tools such as bourbon and blondes. When you now combine Maigret *and* Madame Maigret, as Georges Simenon does in MADAME MAIGRET'S OWN CASE (Doubleday, $2.95), the result is decidedly worth reading. Do so.

This reader rather doubts that Paul Somers' THE SHIVERING MOUNTAIN (Harper's, $2.95) will excite you to the point that you will wish to read about the *earlier* adventures of Hugh Curtis of the *Record* (a London newspaper affluent enough to be able to offer to pay the Thirty Thousand Pounds demanded by the kidnappers of a British scientist) and lovely Mollie Bourne, his professional rival. If you do—blessings on you. The adventures *are* relaxing. . . .

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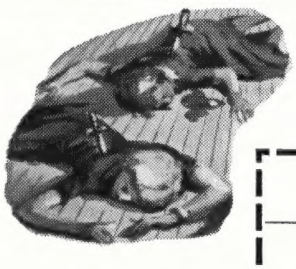

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